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PUTNAM POMFRET'S WARD;

OR,

A VERMONTER'S ADVENTURES IN MEXICO.

BY A. J. H. DUGANNE.

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PUTNAM POMFRET'S WARD.

CHAPTER I.

THE GAMING-HOUSE.

WHAT were the thoughts of the somber-looking man, who, muffled in a dark cloak, which shaded his bronzed face, was leaning against a tree in the street Alameda of Mexico, watching the curtained windows of a large mansion, might not be revealed through his compressed lip and lowering eye. That his meditations were not of a quiet cast was evident from a start which at times pervaded his frame, but whether such movement resulted from anger, fear, or impatience, it was difficult to surmise.

Many persons passed the solitary gazer, some leaving or entering the house; and, as often as the great entrance-door fell back upon its hinges, the muffled watcher bent his glance upon the opening, as if to discover some object of search. Numbers on whom his regards fell seemed to be familiars, and returned his look with a glance of recognition, but none stayed to greet him further, either repelled by his gloomy deportment, or undesirous of colloquy.

Thus an hour or more passed on, and the street began to grow lonely, and echoed only fitfully to the quick tread of belated pedestrians, hurrying homeward. The watcher, it was manifest, began to grow restless, and twice or thrice left his position at the tree, to pass and repass the gaming-house, muttering as he did so an expression of impatience. At last, however, while his gaze rested upon the door, as if he were half in doubt whether it would not be better at once to enter the mansion, a sudden stream of light flashed upon the walk, and the figure of a man descended the heavy stone steps which led to the pavement.

"It is he—it is Falcone!" muttered the muffled observer, and he at once crossed the street.

Apparently, however, he had not calculated on the reception which he was to meet from the other, for his form was yet wrapped closely with his mantle, when the new-comer suddenly threw himself roughly forward, and before a movement could be made by the individual assailed, grasped him savagely by the throat, bearing him to the ground.

The muffled man was one not easily thrown off his guard—nevertheless, the present attack was so unexpected, that for a

moment he felt himself powerless, while the cold muzzle of a pistol was pressed against his forehead, and an agitated voice muttered hoarsely in his ear:

"Your purse, Senor!"

"Take your hand from my throat and your pistol from my head, and we will consider," was the quiet reply.

"Quick—your purse or you die! I am a desperate man!"

"A ruined gamester—ha, Senor!" cried the assailed. "Come, come, I am your friend, and my purse is yours, Senor Falcone!"

"Ha!" exclaimed the footpad, starting and removing his hold, while the other rose to his feet, "you know me?" Then endeavoring to regain the advantage he had resigned, he continued quickly, "but you shall die."

"No so fast, my very good friend. I know you for a brave man, a reckless gamester, and this time for a gentleman of my own cloth, with whom I shall be pleased to drink a glass of wine to our better acquaintance, Senor Falcone."

"And who, in the fiend's name—"

"At your service, Senor. And now," said the stranger, adjusting his collar with a movement at once self-possessed and graceful, "as you have not blown my brains out so suddenly as appeared to be your design a moment since, allow me to be your banker."

Saying this, he drew a heavy purse from his breast-pocket and tendered it to his late assailant.

"I ask pardon! Many thanks!" returned the latter. "I remain your debtor very gratefully, only asking that I may know to whom I am indebted."

"All in good time. For the present be content, Senor Falcone, not to look a gift-horse in the mouth, as we say in Spain."

"Oho! you are then no Mexican?"

"You are very quick at conclusions, Senor. Well, let us part, for I perceive that you have a mind to empty your purse once more at *monte* and I have other business on hand. But you will meet me again, Senor?"

"Gladly, if you but say when and where."

"To-morrow, at sunset, in the botanic garden. Be there, and we may become better acquainted."

"I shall not fail," answered the gambler, warmly grasping the hand which was extended to him, and then turning toward the threshold of the gaming-house, from which he had so recently rushed forth, a despairing bankrupt.

But at this moment, the jalousied door of the mansion was dashed violently open, and a young man, whose countenance appeared ghastly pale, staggered down the steps.

"Another victim!" cried the stranger, with a laugh. "But luckily I have not another purse."

Falcone uttered a cry, as his eyes fell upon the new-comer.

He darted quickly forward, and had half ascended the wide stone steps, when a sharp, ringing report broke the night's stillness, a bright flash illumined for a moment the street, and a dull sound echoed upon the pavement. The body of a dead man rolled down the steps.

"Shot himself!" cried Falcone, with an oath.

"Another victim to *monte*!" muttered the other personage; and then, as the noise of hurrying feet approached, he seized the arm of his new acquaintance, and hurried him from the spot.

"Come with me—*monte* is ended for the night."

Why should it not be? It had made a robber and a suicide in the short space of ten minutes.

CHAPTER II.

THE SUICIDE'S HOME.

AMONG the variously attired and odd-looking persons attracted toward the gaming-house in the street Alameda, by the sudden report of a pistol-shot, one might have been noticed whose exterior presented certainly as strange an appearance as did that of any.

This individual was appareled in garments which seemed to have derived their origin in divers parts of creation, albeit noticeable neither for elegance nor costliness. A broad-brimmed palm-leaf hat slouched over his countenance, with a swaggering sort of air, and a brownish-white linen coat, lamentably tattered, dragged from his shoulders. Tight-fitting breeches of yellow nankeen cotton, with parti-colored woolen stockings of Mexican amplitude drawn over them, completed his singular attire, and he marched with as careless a step as if he trod on land that had belonged to his ancestors, since the days of the Conquistador.

But no one who glanced twice at this person (and there were many who did so,) could have been so far deceived as to fancy him a Mexican; for there was an expression about his actions and manner that stamped him unmistakably as a native of that region whose ambitious representatives are found wherever wind blows or light penetrates, but whose actual localities are embraced in a radius of five hundred miles around Bunker Hill monument.

It was our old friend and adventurer, Putnam Pomfret, the "Knight-Errant" portion of whose history we have narrated in connection with the story of the Peon Prince.

Borne along in the crowd that pressed forward to the spot where, rigid in the embrace of death, the poor suicide lay in a

pool of his own blood, Pomfret reached the gaming-house. The confused noise of exclamations and hurrying feet, lights flashing over many-colored garments, presented a scene both novel and striking to the stranger, and pushing lustily forward to gain a position from which he could behold the cause of excitement, he soon found himself close to the balustraded steps, and directly opposite the body of *monte's* victim.

The dead gambler lay upon his face, his garments saturated with the crimson flood that dyed the pavement, streaming from his shattered forehead; and as one of the crowd stooped and raised his inanimate form, the light of a torch flashed upon his face. Putnam Pomfret bent forward, and saw that it was no Mexican countenance.

Blue eyes, clouded with the film of death, and a fair complexion, slightly shaded by deep masses of flaxen hair, proclaimed at once that the suicide was of Saxon origin. One hand still clutched the instrument of self-murder, and the other was pressed tightly to the cold bosom. Pomfret advanced, and stooping beside the body, loosened the rigid gripe of the closed fingers.

A locket of gold was held firmly between those fingers, as if clasped in the last spasm. The hand, as the Yankee lifted it, seemed to cling tenaciously to the treasured token—a miniature, upon the golden back of which, by the light of a torch, Pomfret beheld inscribed a single line, and that revealed a history:

"To my brother. New Orleans, July 1, 1845."

"He is my countryman!" cried the Yankee, raising the mangled head of the suicide from the pavement, and looking round upon the group of dark-eyed Mexicans, who at once comprehended the feeling which led to the action. Three or four of them immediately stooped beside the body, and raising it gently in their arms, prepared to assist in bearing it to the dead-house.

In Mexico the occurrence of a suicide or assassination is not so rare an event as to create much consternation or wonder. Indeed, save in peculiar instances, a catastrophe like this may take place without seriously breaking in upon the usual routine of business or amusement. Consequently, though the suddenness of the young man's death, and the obviousness of ill-luck at play being its occasion, afforded some food for speculation and discussion among the lookers-on, there is little doubt that Putnam Pomfret was the only breast that throbbed with sincere regret. Only the humble Yankee felt that in the cold weight he was aiding to sustain, was once enshrined a living and immortal spirit. Only he really sorrowed, for he reflected that the dead man was his countryman, and, like himself, a stranger in a strange land.

The somber procession hurried to the nearest guard-house,

there to make the deposition in reference to the finding of the body—for which purpose the inmates of the gambling-house were also summoned. A short examination elicited the brief story of the lost one. He was known to be a young American—a stranger, for some time resident in the capital. What was his name, or what his vocation, could not be so easily learned; but his residence was ascertained from an entry on his tablets, and thither, with Pomfret as its only mourner, the body of the suicide was ordered to be conveyed.

And thus, while the night wore on, and the streets grew silent and deserted, the victim of *monte* was borne to his home—or the house which had been designated as the late residence of the unhappy young man. It was in a retired quarter of the city, and was a dwelling of modest exterior, standing apart from others in the street. Pomfret knocked at the narrow door, which, after a while, was opened by an old negro, who, beholding a group of men disclosed in the dim light, uttered a hasty exclamation in a language recognized at once by the Yankee as his own.

“Come down here,” said Pomfret, beckoning to the black, who evidently hesitated before descending the few stone steps.

But at this moment, the clouds which, during the evening, had overspread the sky, were parted by the full moon, and a stream of light suddenly fell upon the face and figure of the corpse. The negro saw it, and uttering a shrill cry of terror, rushed down from the threshold. He paused a moment with a stupefied air, gazing upon the blood-stained burden which had been deposited by its rude bearers upon the flagging, and then, with a long wail, threw himself upon his knees beside it.

“Oh, massa! massa Charley! Oh Lord! Massa is dead—dead!” cried the black, clasping his arms around the body and rocking his own frame to and fro. “Oh, my dear massa Charley is murdered!”

“Who was your master?” asked Pomfret, in a low voice.

But the negro seemed to have no thought of aught save the fearful spectacle before him. He moaned and essayed to lift the body in his arms, crying, in agonizing tones:

“Murdered—Massa Charley murdered! Oh, what shall I do? Massa’s done gone!”

At length Pomfret succeeded in arresting his attention, and sought a reply to his question, which the negro endeavored to afford, though his words were so broken by sobs as to be scarcely intelligible. And before, indeed, any definite information could be elicited from the agitated slave, for such he apparently was, a new incident added interest to the scene.

The door of the house had been left open by the black, in his hurried movement on recognizing the body of his master; and now, as the old servant renewed his lamentations, a rush was heard through the interior of the hall, and a large dog of the

Newfoundland breed bounded over the threshold, down the steps, and with a loud bark, leaped upon the breast of the suicide. The Mexicans standing near shrieked and fled away, conceiving, in their superstitious fear, that it was no mortal thing they beheld; and the animal, placing his fore-paws upon the bosom of the corpse, raised his head, and gave utterance to a prolonged and dismal howl.

It was a fearful sight. Stretched upon the pavement lay the unfortunate suicide, his garments saturated with blood, his features ghastly and rigid, upturned in the moonlight. Kneeling beside, wildly tearing his grizzled locks in the vehemence of his sorrow, was the old negro, sounding his monotonous, wailing cry. And, erect upon the corpse, his head thrown back, and the frightful howl proceeding incessantly from his massy throat, appeared the dog that had recognized the presence of death. Pomfret, though stout-hearted, could not look, unmoved, on such a scene. He dashed his hand across his eyes, and turned toward the door, but started suddenly at the presence he beheld.

A maiden stood upon the threshold. Clad in a white robe, with one small hand pressed upon her bosom, and the other holding a taper which cast its trembling rays upon the group below, she stood as if paralyzed—her gaze centered upon the suicide's form. It was apparent that she could not at once realize the entire horror of the spectacle, for her heart seemed scarcely to pulsate, her eyes were meaningless. But, presently, as if forced from her by an inward spasm, her voice broke upon the night-air in a cry so agonizing that it was like a dagger stroke upon the bosom of those who heard it. Then, with a bound, the maiden reached the corpse and sunk insensible beside it, her pallid cheek resting upon the cold brow of the dead.

And there they lay together—brother and sister; a sight that might touch the heart of savages, while the negro servant swayed back and forth above them, with clasped hands, murmuring his broken exclamations, and the dog howled in unison the requiem of his slain master.

When Falcone, the gamester, was hurried away by the new-formed and mysterious acquaintance whom he had attempted to rob, the young man presented, under the dim moonlight that struggled through masses of gray clouds, an appearance denoting great internal emotion. His face was ashy white, and his limbs tottered as they obeyed the impetus which hurried him along.

"What, comrade, you are not frightened, surely, that your limbs are so loose?" said the stranger. "Thank your good stars, Senor, that 'tis not your own body, instead of another man's, that is now lying stark before yon gaming-house!"

"Dead!—dead! Oh, horrible! I looked not for *that*!" murmured Falcone, lifting his hands to his eyes, as if to shut out the memory of the scene he had left.

"What troubles you, Senor Falcone?" demanded his companion, essaying to steady the gambler, whose frame swayed to and fro, as he walked.

"I swear by all the saints it was not my work," exclaimed the other, wildly—" 'twas his own act! I killed him not!"

The night had been one of delirium to this wretched youth. At the gaming-table, where he had staked and lost his last dollar, he had also drank deeply, and this, combined with the frenzy of play, and the subsequent tragedy which he had witnessed, now operated with fearful power upon his senses, first to excite, and presently to weaken every mental faculty. Meantime the stranger, who appeared desirous of controlling him for some ulterior purpose, watched the struggle between reason and madness, until the gambler became nearly imbecile, and then, clasping his arm, whispered:

"My friend, the street is not our best bedchamber. Come with me, Gabriel Falcone!"

The young man's eyelids quivered, and he tried to speak, but the effort only shaped some incoherent words. Then his companion bent down, and, embracing him with a vigorous arm, half drew and half lifted him rapidly through the now silent and deserted streets.

After traversing several squares, this singular guide paused before an antique and substantial house, standing back from the walk, and almost hidden by large trees. The doorway of this mansion was open, and a shaded lamp burned in a recess of its hall, where, likewise, was an oaken stand, with a small bell upon it, which Falcone's conductor rung briskly, summoning therewith a bronze-faced servant from a couch near by.

"Domingo! have a bed made ready for this gentleman!" was the abrupt command of the new-comer, who was evidently the master of the ancient house.

The servitor disappeared without speaking, while his master placed Falcone on the couch, and seated himself beside him. The gambler had sunk into a drunken stupor, and his new companion perused his face intently by the light of the solitary lamp in the hall. That face was no longer distorted as when under the influence of his paroxysm in the street. Only a stolid blackness was now apparent, indicating the depression of sensibility by intoxication. The head drooped on the shoulders, the eyes were closed, and a relaxation of every limb showed an utter prostration of energy. In a few moments the servant returned, and, with his master's assistance, conveyed Falcone to an inner apartment, where he was laid on a comfortable bed. Then, as the lackey retired, and the gambler's stertorous breathing gave assurance that he was wrapped in dull slumber, the strange master of the house folded his arms across his breast and looked down on his unconscious guest with a smile of malignant import.

"Gabriel Falcone!" he muttered, a darker shadow sitting over his dark face, while his compressed lips worked nervously, "Gabriel Falcone! I have long sought, and now found you! Your mother, Gabriel, incurred a debt to me, and I forget not—let her forgive. Therefore, Gabriel Falcone, I shall claim full **quittance from you, before we part!**"

Thus the man muttered, an evil smile on his lips; and then, with another look at the gambler's apathetic face, he left him to his slumbers.

CHAPTER III.

THE GOOD MAN'S CLOSING SCENE.

DURING the same hours of night in which were transpiring the scenes already known to our readers, the common tragedy of *death* was transpiring in many streets of Mexico. Indeed, what day or night, what hour or minute, is free from visitation of that dread guest whom all must some time entertain? Whether he come robed in the crimson garments of war, or yellow dappery of pestilence—whether he breathe icily upon Beauty's cheek, or stifle Age with his nightmare embrace, still, death is omnipotent. He enters and departs as he lists, and no man knows when he shall knock at the door of his heart.

But in the passage of a good spirit from earthly habitation, there is no reality of gloom. The wearied sojourner upon earth, whose life has reached its natural term, feels not, if it to die, a bitterness in the cup he must drink. The overwhelmed child of sorrow can not help but welcome the wings which are to sustain him in all future journeyings.

So, then, there was no anguish in the parting of a good man, Don Tadeo, who lay trembling on the threshold of two worlds at the hour of midnight—an aged man, with broad and scarcely-wrinkled brow, over which curled a few locks of silvery hair—an old man, with bright and quiet eyes, wherein shone the assurance of blessed immortality. One of his hands clasped that sacred volume which is the rock of a Christian's faith—the other rested on the breast of a youth who knelt beside the bed with wet cheeks and parted lips.

"Weep not, Alonso!" murmured the dying man. "You have life before you, and I only depart into another life. Cheerily do I go, for I know that goodness remains in the heart of him whom I have cherished as the child of my age. Perhaps, my son, as we have sometimes conjectured, the spirits of the departed are permitted to watch over the friends of their earthly love. Surely, if it be so, my joy must be enhanced in **contemplating my Alonso's virtue and happiness.**"

"Oh! my uncle! my benefactor! my more than father. My God, grant me strength in this hour of trial."

"Be assured that I will, Alonzo. Our parting is only for a season, dear son," said the old man. "Have we not read together," he continued, reverently lifting the Bible to his lips, "not alone the sublime truths of this sacred volume, but the magnificent testimony of that other great book which is unrolled to man's eye in all the universe of matter? Have we not explored the mysteries of celestial creation and looked upon nature in her manifold moods? And shall we have walked together in the lofty pathways of progression, only to be parted now, with no hope of eternal reunion? No, Alonzo, we shall ascend in company the heights of superior knowledge—kneeling and worshipping at still purer shrines, and receiving into our experience the light of wisdom from its fountain head."

The aged man's eyes beamed with beautiful confidence. A soft radiance suffused them, adding tenderness to their expression. His pale cheeks flushed with holy enthusiasm, and pressing the book of God to his heart, he smiled with serene joy.

It needed, indeed, the fortitude both of religion and philosophy to enable the young man to await with resignation the hour of parting from one so dear to him as this old man. Left an orphan in infancy, the child had found a father, the youth discovered a wise friend, in the only brother of his mother. Don Tadeo, disappointed in early life by the death of one to whom he had been betrothed, would never break the sweet tie that linked her memory with his heavenly hope. He had chosen a sequestered life, surrounding himself with books, and devoting his days to two objects, the practice of active benevolence, and the pursuit of knowledge in all her arduous paths. Not wealthy, Don Tadeo possessed enough for his own wants and sufficient to share largely with the needy around him. His years, from the age of thirty, had been spent amid the wild scenery of Upper Mexico—among snow-capped hills, and ample forests, where he breathed the untainted breeze of *la tierra fria*. He lived almost a hermit's life until the death of his sister left the child Alonzo to his care. The orphan gained a kind protector and a happy home, and the bachelor guardian henceforth found an object for his affection, and a docile pupil on whom to lavish the stores of his varied learning. The orphan's childhood and youth passed like a pleasant romance in the retreat of his mountain dwelling place, and it was only during the last year of his uncle's life that he had been a resident of the capital. Up to this period he had dwelt amid nature's haunts, her chosen child, yet imbued with all the mastery lore of elder art. Wandering among solemn woods, musing beside still rivers, or climbing rocky highlands, with brow bared to the fresh mountain breeze, he had drank deep draughts of romance, and mingled the past with the present. His was an existence of quiet, unbroken by the world's tumult—a sunshine untroubled by clouds.

But of late years, the youth's heart had throbbled with indefinite longings for something yet unknown. The tireless monotony of his studies, his walks and reveries, grew irksome and unsatisfying. He felt within him the promptings of some unknown power, ever and anon uplifting a corner of the curtain which enveloped his dreaming soul, and revealing dim glimmerings of a future yet unborn.

And for such an idealistic being destiny was weaving the chains of reality. The hours were slowly bringing to the youth's conception a new thought—a new experience. That awful idea which was first revealed to mankind's stricken progenitors, the full extent of the Eternal's judgment upon their disobedience—that immeasurably awful idea which involves the curse of death—was now about to stir the unrippled waters of Alonzo's enthusiast soul.

The solemn moments lingered, yet passed quickly enough, for they brought nearer and nearer the dissolution of good Don Tadeo. Alonzo vainly endeavored to stifle the expression of his grief, which was yet no unworthy manifestation, for it sprung from the deep and abiding affection which he entertained toward his noble uncle.

Don Tadeo had remained silent for some moments, his lips moving in quiet prayer, and his eyes glowing with sublime confidence in the mercy of that Being in whose presence he was soon to enter. At length, however, the uncle spoke in a low voice:

"Dear Alonzo, before I depart, I have a brief history to relate, which has ever till now been locked within my own bosom. The tomb closes all earthly memories, and I thought to have borne to my grave the reminiscences of sorrow and disappointment which made my youth a desert till Heaven vouchsafed a boon and blessing in giving to me my Alonzo. But now I feel a desire in my heart, urging me to recall the story of my youth, and perhaps, in its recital, you, my boy, may at once learn all that your uncle has ever concealed from you, and gather from the story some knowledge of the strange world on which you are about to enter. Listen!—but first, dear Alonzo, reach to me yonder ebony casket."

The young man arose from his kneeling posture, and proceeding to a bookcase, brought from one of its shelves a small box, of curiously carved ebony, which he knew to be much prized by his uncle. Don Tadeo unlocked this casket, and covering his forehead for a few moments, he remained in thought, as if reviving past recollections. Then he took the young man's hand, and began his narration:

"My Alonzo—you behold tears in these aged eyes; you feel my heart beat wildly, even with failing pulses. Judge, then, Alonzo, what must have been the strength of that passion which, through all the lapse of years, has yet clung to this frail heart!"

Judge how I loved, who, never possessing, have always adored the object of my boyhood's first affection. She was another's, and I learned that she was unhappy—that she was that too common sacrifice to pride and mistaken interest—a bride betrothed from childhood by parents without her own consent. Her husband, older than herself by some score of years, was not a man to win or keep the love of such a woman. Proud, cunning, unscrupulous, he had passed his youth in dissipation, indulging every passion to its utmost limit; and even after his nuptials with the beautiful being he had literally bought (for his wealth was enormous) he never refrained from nor concealed the excesses to which he had become habituated.

"I learned the history of husband and wife, not at once, but at intervals, by degrees; not from Donna Maria's lips, though afterward her heart was opened to me like a sister's; but by observation and the remarks of others, who little suspected my own absorbing interest. At my first meeting with the lovely but unhappy lady, she had been married only a year, and an infant reposed on her tender bosom. How I brought under control the passion which immediately took possession of me; how I afterward refrained from declaring it to Maria when I soon after became a constant visitor at her husband's house and was thrown daily in her company; how I concealed, as a miser does his gold, all manifestation of the fire which was consuming my very existence—He alone knows, who overlooks all hearts, and who in mercy chastened that he might subdue mine.

"But such a struggle could not last. I fell dangerously ill, and for months my life was despaired of. In the ravings of delirium the image of my beloved was ever present to me, and when, at length, a strong bodily frame reacted from the disease which had prostrated it, and I awoke again to reason and the hope of life, my first collected thoughts clustered around the memory of her who was not and never could be mine. *Her* name was the first word that trembled on my lips, and then I learned the destiny of my life—to live in loneliness!"

Don Tadeo paused in his recital, overcome by poignant recollections. Alonzo's face expressed the deep interest which the mournful story excited in his young heart.

"Maria," resumed the old man, mastering his emotion, though his voice, as he went on, became more and more feeble—"Maria was to me and to her husband lost—forever! During those few months when I lay balanced between life and death, a fearful drama had been enacted—and but fitting finale to selfish betrothment and loveless marriage! My adored Maria had deserted her husband—fled, as rumor reported, with one of his licentious companions; leaving home and child to throw herself upon the great unknown world, of which she, poor child, knew scarcely the threshold. The villain suspected to have enticed her, was a young libertine, of fortune equal to that of her husband, and

of a character much like his. But this man, soon after the disappearance of my beloved, had returned to his old haunts, and, when called to account by Maria's husband, denied all knowledge of the woman, and swore that he was not responsible for her absence. His statement, however, was generally disbelieved, inasmuch as circumstances conspired to fix complicity on him; and so bad was his reputation that many scrupled not to suspect him of having added a darker crime to that of abduction. Maria's husband, indifferent as he was, roused himself at this point, fought with his false friend and dangerously wounded him. The authorities took up the matter, but after close examination, no positive evidence was elicited in support of the popular sentiment, and the libertine, recovering from his almost fatal wound, soon after left Mexico for foreign parts."

Again Don Tadeo hid his face with his transparent fingers; and Alonzo, though deeply interested, implored his uncle to refrain from recalling to memory events so harrowing to his soul. But Don Tadeo shook his head, and proceeded with his story:

"When I recovered so far as to be able to go out, I learned another act in the wretched tragedy. Maria's husband, tormented with chagrin at the flight of his wife, and perhaps conscious that his own worthless character had been the occasion of it, gave himself up from the time of his dad to a course of reckless dissipation which speedily brought him to the gates of death. At the period when these details were communicated to me, the miserable man was raving under the horrors of *mal de a jo'a*, from which malady he never recovered."

Don Tadeo ended his narrative, and, lifting the lid of the little casket that had remained on the bed beside him, he took from it a golden locket, the spring of which he pressed, and disclosed the miniature likeness of a beautiful woman.

"This was the shadow of my Maria," murmured Don Tadeo, "and I give it into your keeping as the most sacred memento of your poor uncle, who, loving the dear original, during his lonely life, now welcomes the approach of death in the sweet hope of reunion with *her* angelic spirit in that land where we shall see no longer through a glass, darkly, but face to face."

With these words Don Tadeo pressed the portrait to his lips, kissing it softly, while bright tears rolled slowly down his aged cheeks. Replacing the locket in its casket with his own trembling hand, he fell gently back on the pillow, then, with a sigh so low that it seemed but a natural inspiration, the good man's spirit passed to another home—so calm and quiet was the transition; and perhaps Don Tadeo already clasped the hand of his immortal beloved, awaiting him without, ere yet his mortal friend had ceased to muse upon his dying words, so full of tenderest hope.

CHAPTER IV.

THE YANKEE.

PETNAM POMFRET, as he sat by an open window, looking forth into the gray dawning of a Mexican day, exhibited very little of that self-assured and reckless expression which is supposed to characterize the North American Saxon in foreign lands. In truth, he had passed a night of anxiety and unrest, for it had been his sorrowful task to watch beside the corpse of that unfortunate countryman, whose rash hand had dared to break the temple of his own despairing soul, and hurl the naked and shivering spirit into the dread presence of an Almighty Judge.

Through the still hours of night, when the officers of police, and the curious Mexicans who accompanied them, had retired to their various houses, Pomfret remained in the house of death, solemnly impressed with the duty required at his hands by the claim which he recognized as sacred above all things—the kindred of country recognized in a strange land. Happily, however, he was spared the witness of another's sorrow—a sorrow that brooked no sympathy, admitted of no solace—the sorrow of that young and lovely being, the sister of the lost young man. In that dreadful moment, when, at the sight of her brother's mangled form, the reason of the maiden yielded to the blow, and with a frenzied cry, she sunk beside the bed—in that moment a deep insensibility overwhelmed her, and she fell into a stupor that happily continued for the night. The old negro, assisted by a female servant, conveyed his unconscious mistress to her chamber, and then returned to aid in the disposition of his master's remains. And when the body, lifted from the pavement into an apartment of the house, was laid upon the couch which had been the young man's bed when living, the faithful black resumed his kneeling posture beside it, and shared with the moaning dog the wretched vigils of the night. Pomfret, after giving his name and residence to an official, in order that he might be found if required to undergo any further examination concerning the suicide, was allowed to remain in the house of his late countryman, and when all had departed, he took his position in an anteroom adjoining the apartment in which the corpse was deposited, and there awaited, with sleepless eyes, the coming of another morn.

"Let me see," soliloquized the Yankee, crossing his legs, as he shifted himself in the wide arm chair which he had been occupying, and from which he could view the open door of another room—the one in which the corpse lay, attended by the

faithful negro, and the no less devoted dog—"Le' me see," he repeated, placing the fore-finger of his right hand against his forehead, and then bringing it across the palm of his left as if to assist and fix his memory of what he desired to recall—"I was comin' from the padry's house, at twelve o'clock, and walkin' short tracks for lodgin's, when this 'ere poor chap, thisarnation fool—I mean this 'ere poor critter that's in t'other room, fired his hoss-pistil into his own head—so far, that's correct; I'll swear to it before any of the Mexikin' p'lice fellers—hallo! Sambo, what's wanted?"

This question was addressed to the negro servant of the deceased, who had entered the anteroom unperceived, and now stood beside Pomfret's chair. The appearance of the black denoted that he had passed a weary and painful night; his eyes were bloodshot and sunken, and the jet of his cheeks now looked gray and ashy in the light of early day. Putnam Pomfret could not but be impressed with pity for the evident anguish of the servant, visible in every lineament of his aged countenance.

"De gemman is 'Merican—is de gemman?" hesitated the negro, as he looked beseechingly at Pomfret.

"Yes, and no mistake—American to the backbone, poor critter!" returned the Yankee. "And I calculate your poor master was a leetle too much so, too, for these poor heathen Mexikins. Jerusalem! if a chap don't know their tricks, the p'isonest sarpints ain't wuss to get along with."

"Massa was murdered; he nebber kill hisself," said the black, solemnly.

"There you're rayther too fast," replied Pomfret, "see it's how I was one of the fast that saw him, jest as he lay, with the pistil in his hand. No, poor critter, I hain't any doubt you love your massa, but depend on't, he shot himself with his own individual hand, and no mistake."

"Massa nebber kill hisself," repeated the negro, shaking his head.

"What on airth do ye mean, critter?" asked the Yankee, somewhat nonplussed at the pertinacity with which the old servant persisted, as he thought, in doubting the fact of his master's self-destruction. "What ar' ye drivin' at, with that 'ere word of yours? Don't ye b'lieve a feller, when he tells you jest what he has seen, and nothin' else?"

"De gemman 'll please 'scuse de ole nigger," answered the servant, in a deprecating tone. "But de gemman nebber know'd Massa Charley. Massa Charley, Lor' bless him, hadn't de heart to kill a chicken, much less himself, ar' break poor missy's heart and leave all de family to grieve an' sorer f'oreb'rmore. Oh, gorra me, what'll poor missy do? I'm aicard she'll nebber live to see de ole place ag'in. 'Spect they'll murder missy and de ole nigger jes' as dey kill poor Massa Charley."

"But I tell ye, your Massa Charley wan't murdered by no one."

"Spec s you tink so, sar, but you isn't knowin' to all de circumstances. Berry like, Massa Charley hole de pistil in his own hand an' pull de trigger. But who load de pistil, sar? Who stan' behind Massa Charley an' say 'shoot—shoot you'self, Massa Charles Ginton?' "

The negro, as he hurriedly uttered these words, fixed his eyes upon Pomfret with a glance which at once satisfied the latter that a rare intelligence was concealed under the old slave's woody skin. He divined, also, that a mystery rested behind the apparent natural result of suicide consequent upon a ruined gambler's despair of retrieving his fortunes, and the few sentences of the negro made him suspect that some malign influence had been exerted upon the unfortunate young American, leading him to the course of life which had ended so fatally. The Yankee, therefore, with a tact which was natural to him, prepared to glean from the black whatever might be of importance in his instantly-conceived design to investigate the causes which had resulted in so sad a catastrophe to a fellow-countryman.

It was no idle curiosity that prompted this resolution upon the part of Putnam Pomfret; for, besides that his earnest sympathy had been aroused by the fact of the young suicide being an American, he had learned enough through the incoherent exclamations of the negro and female attendant on the previous night, to be aware that the suicide's sister was left alone and friendless in the foreign city, a position which, to the Yankee's mind, gave her at once a claim to all the service and assistance he could render her; for Pomfret remembered a cherry-checked sister of his own in their far-off New England homestead, and he resolved, like a true-hearted American as he was, to hold himself ready for aught that might be necessary in the defense and protection of his fair young countrywoman.

With this motive alone, he began to consider the best method of learning the position of the family with whom he had become acquainted so suddenly, in order that he might use the information to their immediate advantage, if necessary. But he was prevented from at once questioning the old servant by the sudden entrance of the female attendant, who had passed the night with her young mistress. Her appearance at once threw the negro into a state of increased agitation; he clasped his hands together and tottered forward to meet her, exclaiming:

"Oh, Lucille, whar's missy? Whar' you leave de poor chile? Gorra, Lucille, my heart is jes' like to break in pieces."

"Hush b'gones, Hush b'gones! Mademoiselle is to have sleep, it must be she is not disturbed. Oh, ciel! What a night I have spent! *Quel horreur!* Oh! *pauvre Monsieur Charles!* Zey have kilt him—zey have kilted him dead, and we are all lost—*perdus!*"

Lucille, a lively looking young mulatto girl, with a truly French air of coquetry about her, seemed utterly broken down in contemplation of the sad event which had taken place. She wiped the tears incessantly from her pretty eyes with the corner of her embroidered apron, and continued her vehement exclamations:

"*Oh, ciel!* What shall we do? Mam'selle will die! All is lost!"

Pomfret for some moments remained silent, not knowing how to check the passionate grief of both negro and mulatto, who evidently grew more excited in witnessing each other's perturbation. At length, however, the Yankee ventured to address Lucille.

"It's a mighty dreadful case, and no mistake," he began, "and calls for a sight o' philosophy and pious fortitude, an' common sense into the bargain. Here's a young gentleman, a real fine, free-hearted American gentleman, from New Orleans—e'enamost a stranger in this 'ere heathen town, and a 'tuned sight too good to walk its streets—that's Master Charles Ginton I'm talking 'bout, ye see, don't ye, Hannibal? don't ye, Miss Lucille?"

"Oh, gorra!" ejaculated the negro. "An' sich a noble gentleman led away, an' cheated out o' his money an' his life. Oh, gorra!"

"And by a villain—*Oh, ciel!* What is his name? Mam'selle so detest—so fly away from, every day when he come. Ah! he is traitor. He is ze cause of all."

"Mister Charles trusted his friend too much, I reckon," said Pomfret, suggestively.

"I tink Massa Falcone no frien' at all," rejoined the negro Hannibal. "What for you call him frien' o' Massa Charley? Gorra! good frien' no make him drink de champagne, till he rave like de mad. De good frien' no say, 'Come, Charley Ginton, come to de gran' saloon, where dey play de *monde*.' No, no, Massa Falcone is no frien'—he is de 'casion of massa shoot hisself—all for spite o' missy. Eh, Lucille—don't you tink dat am de reason?"

"*Vraiment—c'est comme ça.* I have not one doubt. Mam'selle cannot bear ze sight of Monsieur Falcone. She drive him once, twice many times away; Mam'selle absent—shut ze chamber, when Monsieur Falcone come."

"And Mister Charles did not like that, did he?" asked the Yankee.

"Not much. He was—what you call *tête monté*—he tink Monsieur Falcone *un bon ami—un frère*. Truly, I believe, he tink him one brother; eh, Hannibal?"

"Oh, poor massa! dat Massa Falcone fool him all de time."

"And so when mam'selle refuse—declare she will not see ze Spanish friend, zen Monsieur Charles and Monsieur Falcone

dine together, once, twenty time; and Monsieur Charles become — *oh, oh* — what you call tipsie — drunk; and zen mam'selle weep so much, implore her brother zat he will no more drink ze champagne, and zat he will return wizeh us all to New Orleans; and Monsieur Charles promise — one dozen times — to do all zat mam'selle desire."

"Poor fellow, he could not keep his promise," said Pontret.

"Ze devil did tempt him, when Monsieur Falcone come a ruin. Zey drank ze wine, zey laughed at mam'selle's fear. Monsieur Falcone say ar he vill take good care of his friend Charles — and so — *disappears*! What good care he has taken! *Voua*!"

The mulatto, saying this, pointed to the open door of the apartment wherein lay the body of her late master, and then, relapsing into a torrent of tears, covered her face with her apron and sat down on a low stool beside the negro Hannibal, who echoed every sob she uttered. Pontret needed no more to afford him an explanation of all the circumstances connected with the death of Charles Ginton. He saw that some false friend had exerted a ruinous influence over the destiny of the young American, and though knowing nothing of the character or station of the Falcone to whom both Lucille and Hannibal appeared to attribute their misfortunes, he could not help feeling that some nefarious scheme had conducted to Ginton's ruin. The fact of the sister's dislike to her brother's friend, her tender solicitude, and the manner in which its influence had been counteracted, satisfied Pontret that his countryman had been led on, step by step, to indulge in dissipation and play, until, ripened for destruction, he had fallen a victim to his own desperation, urged on, doubtless, through the evil counsel of his false friend. When this conviction settled itself in the Yankee's mind he resolved at once to pursue such measures as would at least preserve the desolate sister from any peril that might arise from her unprotected situation. Pontret's resolves never waited long before being put in execution; so, rising from the arm-chair where he had passed the night, he enjoined upon both servants the necessity of preserving strict watch of the house, and above all things of permitting their mistress to sleep as long as possible.

"Por," said he, as he rubbed his moist eyes with a cotton kerchief, "the poor gal'll have to bear a mighty big load when she wakes, and it'll do no harm if she gets a little strength to help her. So jes' keep watch of the house, and let your young mistress sleep as long as she can. I'm goin' arter some one who kin do ye all more good than I can."

So saying, Pontret fixed his broad-brimmed hat securely upon the back of his head, and shaking hands with the weeping servants, set out from the house of sorrow, just as sunlight was beginning to struggle between the high walls of the ancient houses, or through the branches of old trees which lined the walk over which he briskly proceeded.

And as that humble-looking Yankee, in worn and travel-stained habiliments, hurried through the streets, no Mexican who passed him would have believed in the possibility of such a shabby individual, however good might be his heart, having any practical power to succor or protect even his own person from aggression. Nor would any Mexican grandee or lepero have credited such a foolish prediction as might have been made at the time—that this identical Yankee, Pomfret, would himself hoist the flag of his country upon the walls of the proudest palace in Mexico—before many years should pass away. So ridiculous an idea would have been scouted by the meanest beggar of the capital. So, in happy ignorance of what was to come, the Mexicans who passed Pomfret only greeted him with a look of contempt or indifference. And the Yankee heeded, as he went, neither grandee nor beggar. He was thinking of the suicide and his desolate young sister.

CHAPTER V.

PADRE HERRATA IN THE HOUSE OF MOURNING.

IN the back room of a single-storied, squalid-looking house, or rather hovel, situated on one of the principal streets, and surrounded on every side by imposing palaces, under the shadow of which it seemed to shrink and hide like a scared beggar child in some gorgeous cathedral—in the solitary back room of that unpretending hut, sat a man whose age might not be determined by his features, since in their expression was observable that mixture of youthful freshness with the wisdom of mature years, which distinguishes some countenances, to the manifest perplexity of the best physiognomists. Nevertheless, though it was difficult to settle upon the man's exact age, it was not hard to conjecture, by the mingled softness and determination stamped in his every lineament, that the priest, for such his vesture showed him to be, was neither of a harsh nor common nature. His eyes were bright and penetrating in their gaze, his cheeks ruddy, and his brow thoughtful, but neither deeply marked with wrinkles nor sallow from midnight vigils. The capacity for action as well as reflection was plainly apparent to an observer in both face and figure of the good father, who now bowed his head against the wall of the hut, as he sat on a block of wood which answered for a chair, and who, as if in assistance of his meditations, smoked quietly a cigarette which he had just rolled up.

The smoke of this cigarette, ascending in the confined apartment, soon encircled the priest's head with a grayish cloud, which suited very well the dim light that entered the hut through an unglazed aperture in the rear wall. The morning breeze,

for the sun had just risen, slightly agitated the wreaths of smoke, and blew aside the stray locks of hair which grew on either side of the padre's tonsure—but otherwise a character of intense quiet and repose was presented within the hovel, in which the occupant seemed to share equally with the place.

But a sudden tap upon the outside of the wooden window-pane, followed by the appearance of a grotesque-looking head at the aperture above mentioned, aroused the good priest from his reverie, and caused him at once to remove his cigarette and to turn his head toward the new-comer. A glance of pleased recognition accompanied the movement, and he said, in a low voice:

"*Benedicite*, my son! you are stirring early this morning."

"Yes, and I calc'late I was stirrin' late last night, padre. And that's the why and wherefore I'm here now. I want your advice, padre, seem's how two heads are better than one, and I want you to come straight along, ef you can conscientiously, for I'm in a hobble, an' no mistake."

"The saints preserve us, son; you are not in trouble with the police, I trust?"

"Oh, nothin' o' that sort, padre. 'Tain't for myself I'm afeard, no how. Put Pomfret can hoe his own row, now I tell ye. But ef you want to save as nice a critter as ever wore calico, from some consarned chap that's been a-plottin' ag'in her, and gittin' her brother shot, and actin' like pizen ginerally, I reckon now's your time, and no mistake. So, padre, beggin' pardon, supposin' we hurry up our teams and push along!"

The worthy priest smiled at the Yankee's earnest adjuration, and proceeded to interrogate him farther in relation to the object which he had in view.

"There are, I fear me, some dark purposes threatening this poor young lady," said the priest, after hearing all, "and the Almighty may permit us to be the instruments of counteracting them. We must learn more from those faithful servants, and it need be, Signor, interest more powerful friends."

"I know you kin du jest about what you please with Mister Herrera, padre. I'd like to see our old friend Zumozin, who's got to be great now, and that 'ere real fightin' chap, Captin' Nuttaz—I'd like to see both on 'em standin' right side of you this minute. Jehosaphat! them two fellers are the sort o' critters to walk into rascality, an' no mistake."

"The friends you name are noble spirits, and would be of much assistance to us in any crisis. But Montagnone seldom leaves his retired estate in the mountains, and Colonel Nunez, as you know, is with the army. And we may not need them, my son. Perhaps our fears are magnified in regard to your countrywoman. Of that we shall soon learn more. Let us depart at once."

"Padre, I ain't afeard o' any harm while you're about. By

the 'tarnal hokev, I know you're clean grit when occasion requires. I only kind o' hanker arter a sight o' Captain Nunez, because he's a boss, and no mistake. As you say, padre, there's no tellin' whether we shall want any help at all; but let's be moving spy."

The padre at once proceeded to the door of the hut, to join his American friend, passing through the front room of the hotel, and only pausing a moment to speak to an old-fashioned woman, his hostess, who was bustling about. Then unlatching the front outer door, he emerged into the street, and set off with Pomfret.

The noise and bustle of daily life was beginning to fill the streets along which they took their way, and on arriving at their destination they found that the officers of the police were busily engaged in making an examination of the premises, interrogating the servants, and with all the airs of authority, placing the seals of official interference upon such cabinets and desks as they deemed the repositories of papers or documents likely to be of importance in the event of farther action on the part of the district alcalde. At the appearance of a priest, they bowed respectfully, but continued their scrutiny; and Pomfret, as his eyes glanced hurriedly around the apartment, which was the room that he had occupied alone during the night and comparisons to that in which lay the corpse of Ginton, saw that no other was present besides the two weeping servants of the household. This was the suicide's sister.

The maiden's face was pale as marble, and her eyes heavy with a bitter grief. She sat in a large arm-chair near the window, wrapped in a loose white robe, secured about the waist by a blue sash, and clasped upon her bosom by a small golden cross. In her dark brown hair was twined a wreath of yesterday's roses, drooping and withered now, alas! like the sweet child whose brow they had decked. She was indeed but a child to look upon, for scarcely seventeen summers had passed over her, and the light of girlhood had, until this fatal hour, been bright within her, and a clear, ringing laugh and sunny smile more natural to her than sighs or tears. But now, oppressed and bending beneath the weight of her loneliness, with the image of her bleeding brother evermore present in her thoughts, she sat motionless in the great arm-chair, her eyes shaded by her hands, her tresses falling down and disordered upon her neck, and a deep abstractedness of sorrow in her whole appearance that showed how perfectly her spirit was crushed, how measureless was the abyss of her despair.

The padre, as his pitying eye rested upon the young girl, felt at once, with the quickness of a good heart, how vain would be all common modes of solace for the anguish of the bereaved one. He was well read in life's sad lore, and to read the pages of many a book of grief had been his duty often in the past; for

the priest's existence had not been dreamed away in cloistered idleness. His experience, gleaned in many lands and among various sects and qualities of men, was narrowed by no arbitrary application, and his clarity, expanded by his acquaintance with suffering and endurance, was something more than a mere mantle of conventionalism; it entered into and radiated from his every act and word, so that unconsciously he won the trust of others, and administered consolation because he had first **awakened interest.**

It was therefore with true delicacy that the good man approached the stricken maiden to tender her the spontaneous sympathy of his soul. While Pomfret turned aside with the chief officer, to answer some interrogatory which the functionary addressed to him, the padre softly laid his hand upon the bowed head of the young girl, and said, gently, "Daughter, I sorrow with thee."

The tone of the priest's voice and the gentle pressure of his hand aroused the maiden from the apparent stupor into which she had fallen. Her own hands dropped slowly from before her eyes, and she lifted her glance to the speaker's face with an expression of such mingled fear and anguish, that it penetrated at once to the priest's heart. But his own look, so mild yet earnest, so full of love and pity, yet withal with such an influence of strength irradiating from it, seemed to arrest the current of the poor girl's reflections. She gazed a moment up on the stranger's features, her troubled countenance revealing naught but perplexity and wondering emotion, her eyes tearless, as if their grief had been wept to desert dryness, and then, with an inexpressibly touching movement, shook her head in silence, as if in utter abandonment of every hope of consolation.

"Nay, my child—my poor child, I would not see despair in one so young. I know the sorrow which oppresseth thee is stern and difficult to bear. But it is not amid flowers alone that the path of life conducts to heaven. Behold! through clattering hail cometh sweetest mercy; and He who tempers the wind to the bark that hath been shorn, will tenderly look down on thee, **my stricken one.**"

Blessed tears! what heart would break not, were their precious flow denied? What nature, steeled though haply it may be against all chances of the world's hard field—what self-reliant spirit, proudly mailed in triple panoply of harsh resolve—what soul increased in custom's adamant, but yet will own the healing charm of tears? They are the medicine of desperate grief; they quicken better moods in baser hearts, and melt the roughest inhumanity will. But to the good they are like angel-food, that beautifies and strengthens while it fills—the balm of sorrow, that with healing charm overflows the heart, and waters in its mold her germs of living hope.

Such tears, such blessed tears, now softened the sister's heart,

raining upon the bitter memory of her brother's death and cleansing it of that blood-stained horror which had well nigh driven her mad.

In the mean time, Pomfret, after satisfactorily replying to all the questions which the Mexican police thought proper to inflict upon his good-nature, received a permit from these worthy officials, authorizing him, as a countryman of the deceased, to take charge of the preparations which might be necessary, both for his funeral and for the protection of such property as he might have possessed. In obtaining this liberty, the Yankee owed much to a paper which he exhibited, signed by the President of the Republic, vouching for his respectability, and for his Excellency's confidence in him, as one who had rendered good service to the commonwealth. Though the sight of this document occasioned some expression of wonderment on the part of the Mexican functionaries, inasmuch as our friend Pomfret's grotesque and careless appearance did not tally well with the character or services which were indicated in its contents, yet, as there was no disputing the authenticity of the paper, the Yankee was elevated at once in the eyes of his examiners as a personage of no common pretensions—perhaps some graduate of the neighboring republic, on an *incognito* mission to General Herrera. Consequently, it was with great show of courtesy and respect that Pomfret was invested with authority to bury his countryman; and the Mexicans, in taking their leave, invoked a thousand saints to aid the "noble American" in his *disinterested service to the dead*.

The Yankee, relieved from the presence of the police, and remarking with gratification the soothing influence which his friend the padre had exerted upon the mourning sister, turned his attention at once to the steps requisite in order to perform the last duties to poor Ginton's remains. Quietly beckoning to the two servants, he led the way to the inner room.

The suicide's body lay where it had been deposited on the previous night. A mantle concealed all but the bloodless features, which were also hidden by a white candle-hankerchief, bound around the forehead. A dark stain was visible upon this handkerchief, but on one corner might be perceived, wrought with figures of lace, evidently the work of some graceful female hand, a small scrolled shield, in which were embroidered the same words that Pomfret had read upon the locket found upon Ginton—"To my brother, N. O., 1845." Alas! that the gift of sisterly affection should now be devoted to so sad a use.

Upon the heart of the corpse was a small wooden crucifix which some pious enthusiast among the Mexican police had there laid, perhaps in the hope that it might be beneficial to the soul which had been evoked so suddenly to its account.

Pomfret remarked the emblem, but he did not remove it, nor

smile at the superstition which had caused it to be placed there ; Protestant by education as he was, our American could yet respect the sincerity of another's faith, though he might not himself subscribe to its dogmas. He prepared to make the necessary dispositions for interment, giving directions to the two servants, who appeared to recognize in him a friend on whom they might rely, and in a brief space, the poor victim to a ruinous passion was arrayed in the habiliments of the grave, and stretched upon the last couch which he should press above the green sod that must, sooner or later, be the couch of all.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO GAMESTERS AND A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST.

"GABRIEL FALCONE! we must trust each other!"

These words were spoken by the master of that house to which the gamester had been conducted. A night's sleep had operated to restore the young man's strength, but his nerves still remained under excitement. On opening his eyes, he recognized at his bedside the acquaintance whom he had made so recently, and on his own part ; and it was in response to his first exclamation that his singular host uttered the words which begin this chapter.

"You would know who I am?" continued the man. "Let me first assure you that your father knew me well!"

"What know you of my father?" demanded Falcone abruptly, lifting his bloodshot eyes.

"What the world knows partially," answered the other—"that he trusted a woman and was fooled, as he deserved to be!"

"Do you speak of my mother, sir?"

"Most assuredly, of that lovely sinner!" rejoined the host, with a cynical laugh. "A mother she was, indeed, Gabriel Falcone, who could abandon her infant child, and elope with a lover from her husband's home!"

"What right have you to speak thus of my father's unhappy wife. And for what purpose do you recall her name?"

"I said, Gabriel Falcone, that we must trust each other," replied the other, deliberately. "Listen, then, to what I have to tell you! But, firstly, do me the favor of observing this scar."

And the speaker, loosening the belt of his dressing-gown and baring his side, disclosed a white, oval scar raised on the darker skin. It was apparently the mark of a bullet wound.

"You see this token of a skillful duelist. You may be proud of it, Falcone, since it was your father who did me the honor of putting a ball within hair's breadth of my heart."

"You are, then, the man who—"

"I am that poor devil of an abused friend, who had the ill-luck to incur the jealousy of your father, for no reason whatever, save that my face was a handsome one, and your mother a woman of taste. In fine, I am Don Ricardo Ramos, of whom you have heard gossip doubtless, since your lady-mother, and who now has the pleasure of being very much at your service."

The flippant manner in which this sentence was delivered did not conceal a certain bitterness of tone which caused the young man to shudder. The young gamester's course of improvidence and dissipation, culminating in his reckless attempt to rob the man to whom he now listened, had not totally blunted his sensibilities, and the stranger's sinister allusions to his father's affairs aroused a sudden feeling of anger, which at once sought vent.

"I have heard of you, Don Ricardo Ramos," he exclaimed, "as a villain—a traitorous wretch, whom—"

He paused, as if reluctant to couple the memory of his parents with their disgrace.

"Go on, Gabriel! Proceed, excellent son! By my patron saint!—whoever that holy personage may be—I would not spoil such a eulogy—"

Falcone turned abruptly, and stretching out his arm, seized his coat, which lay upon a chair near the bed. Then, tearing from its pocket the purse of money which he had received the night before from Don Ricardo Ramos, he flung it angrily against his host's bosom.

"There," he muttered, fiercely, "there is your gold, which I had better have wrested, a prize, from your dead body than received as a gift from your accursed living hand."

"Bravo! Very well done, Gabriel Falcone," remarked the host, with unmoved voice and manner. "I see that, among other accomplishments, you have a truly dramatic way of expressing your sentiments. Allow me to admire you, Gabriel Falcone!"

"It becomes the devil to sneer," muttered Falcone, writhing in his bed, and scowling at his colloquist.

"Nay, nay," cried Don Ricardo, suddenly changing to a tone of apparent feeling. "Let us be friends! I was wrong to speak as I did; and now hear me, Falcone, while I declare to you, on my life and soul, that in the wrong done your father, I was guiltless! In this body now," he continued, contracting his forehead, "I carry about the bullet which he lodged in my breast; and I may be pardoned if the constant presence of such a memento makes my language sometimes rough. I never won the favor of your mother! I was the object of her dislike, and when she fled with another to a foreign land, her conduct was as much a mystery to me as to her husband. Thus, Gabriel Falcone, I swear to you!"

Don Ricardo watched the effect of his address upon the young men, who, weak from his emotions, had fallen back upon the pillows. Receiving no response, he went on:

"I have offered you my friendship in consideration of that which I owe to your father, who, in his injustice to me, deceived himself. And, in truth, Gabriel, how can the abuse inflicted upon my friendship compare with the wrong done to you, an innocent son?"

"What mean you by that?" asked Falcone.

"Simply," rejoined Don Ricardo, "that, whereas you shall now be in possession of the entire wealth left by your father, his unjust suspicions of your legitimacy induced him to transfer the bulk of his fortune to a younger branch of the family. Is it not true that your uncle and his sons enjoy vast revenues from the Falcone estates, while you, having squandered a mere legacy, now stand stripped of every thing—a genteel lepero of the capital?"

Falcone fixed his eyes on Don Ricardo's calm face, with a bewildered stare. Then, striking his forehead with clenched hand, he muttered, in a savage tone, "By the fiend! what you say is all true! But how know you that my father disinherited me? Is it not true that the estates in my uncle's possession were left to him by a distant relation?"

"It is all well, my poor Falcone, that you should believe it to be as they say, inasmuch as the will which stripped you might have been validly contested. Lawyers, instead of crooks, might have raked in your last dollar."

"By heaven! I would have torn his ill-gotten wealth from this gray-beard uncle of mine, though my own life were the price."

"You could not have done so," returned the other, dryly. "Answer me—how many days have passed since you called on that gray-beard relative, to inquire a simple and not enormous loan, and were most cavalierly refused, though the good Don Ricardo did not know the money was to be staked at *monté*, peradventure?"

"Don't," cried Falcone—"you know that I was refused—"

"I have said so, it is certainly to know a great deal about your movements, good Gabriel! But I make no claim to sitanic omniscience, and shall refer my interest in your affairs to its very natural cause—old friendship for your family!"

Again the man's brow contracted, and his lips quivered. But Falcone took no note; else, perhaps, he might not have extended his hand, as he did, saying:

"Pardon me, Don Ricardo—I did you wrong in my anger. If you are disposed to serve me, I neither desire, nor can afford, to reject your friendship. There is my hand again."

"And now, as we are friends," said Don Ricardo, "I *would* serve you. But first, let us, as I said, confide in each other.

Tell me, Gabriel, why the death of that gambler last night so strangely affected you. Did you know him?"

"Know him?" echoed the young man, with a sudden tremor evident in his voice. "Yes—he was a sort of boon companion—that is all."

"A spendthrift, doubtless, and gamester; fair representative of Mexican youth."

"He was no Mexican," rejoined Falcone.

"What! a European?"

"No—an American from New Orleans. Doubtless his name is now well known to all the city—Charles Glinton."

"Glinton!" exclaimed Don Ricardo, with a start.

"Ay—Glinton! Did *you* know him, that his name agitates *you*?"

"Doubtless I have met him or his kindred in my wandering life. The name, it is true, awakened vivid reminiscences, which yet may have no connection with this youth. Was he a stranger here?"

"He resided here a few months, and—"

"Well—why do you stop?"

"What do I know of the wretched suicide?" cried Falcone, in a fierce tone, as if he would shake off a fearful recollection.

"How many ruined fools have preceded him in the same course and end? It may be *my* fate yet," continued the young man, gloomily.

"Well, despair not yet, Gabriel," said Don Ricardo. "I saved you from one crime last night, and perhaps can put you in a way to repair your shattered fortunes. For the present, I request that you will remain quiet in this apartment, for you are yet weak and require rest. On the table yonder is a bell, by which you may summon your attendant. By eve, I trust to find you much restored, and till then will leave you to yourself."

With these words, Don Ricardo Ramos stooped to the carpet, and lifting the purse of money which Falcone had thrown at his feet, deposited it, without farther remark, upon a small table near the bedside. Then, with a parting salutation, he retired from the room.

Falcone listened to the departing footsteps of his host with an expression of mingled distrust and satisfaction apparent in his handsome though dissipated countenance. He raised himself slightly upon his pillow, and gazing scrutinizingly around the apartment, seemed desirous of familiarizing his glance with every object visible. Grim, old-fashioned, wainscoted and grotesquely carved, the walls and doors of this apartment appeared to shadow forth the sinister character of their master, Don Ricardo. A book-case of black, polished wood stood in one corner, an escritoire of the same fabric stood in another nook, and the heavy arm-chairs, a massy couch, half covered

by the thick window drapery above it, and the bedstead on which the guest lay, that seemed a relic of the Spanish invasion, all bore token, not more of an antique taste than of a somber disposition in him who possessed and preserved them.

Falcone noticed every thing in a brief glance, and then, smiling bitterly, muttered, as he fell back upon his pillow :

"This man was my father's friend and enemy, so all report has vouched. Whether his friendship for me be worth my preserving, is to be seen. At present I will profit by his advances, for, by the fiend, I have no other resource;"—the gamester's eye fell upon the purse which Don Ricardo had placed upon the table near him—"truly, it was a silly freak of passion that prompted me to dash his gold at the man's feet. I must be more cautious in the future, for such purses grow not on every bush in Mexico. And—now," continued Falcone, while his eye glowed with an expression of cunning resolve, "now that Gilton's death has beggared his lovely sister, it may be that Gabriel Falcone will not be so unwelcome to the maiden—provided that his purse be full. This Don Ricardo shall assist me *there*, at least."

So saying, the young man, brooding over the means of furthering his schemes of villainy, snatched the purse from the table, and placed it once more in the garment from which he had taken it. Then apparently exhausted, he closed his eyes as if to sleep.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DOUBLE FUNERAL AND A DISCOVERY.

THE sun was descending upon the islands and lagunes of Mexico's incomparable valley—bathing the quadrangular city itself in a flood of yellow light, beneath which the lofty churches and towered convents, and splendid private mansions glittered like a fairy panorama. On the beautiful Lake Tezouco, skimming amid the still attractive remnants of its once magnificent flower-gardens, the light boats of pleasure-seekers darted to and fro, and the souls of romance-lovers, won by the beauty of the approaching evening, dispersed themselves at various points, enjoying the cool mountain breeze that floated mysteriously from the *temple of the north* of the north.

Wherever beauty reigns, it is tempered, perchance sanctified, by sorrow—and so, upon the quiet levelness of the Mexican evening, when the perfume of a thousand flowers imparted a delicious aroma through all the air, and when the flute-like warbling of a hundred golden-plumaged birds united in a dreamy strain of music, till the atmosphere seemed loaded with

its mingled wealth of harmony and fragrance, it was no wonder that a shadow intervened between the setting sun and those whose hearts were fitted to enjoy its brightness.

A funeral cortege emerged from the city, near the national bridge, and slowly took its way toward a quiet burial-place, where thick-embowered groves, garlanded with vines, and emerald openings, tessellated with flowers, marked the chosen spot of all for nature to receive her wearied children in the bosom of their mother earth. Slowly and solemnly over the highway and through a shaded road diverging from the lake, and up a gentle rise of verdure-covered hills, the funeral procession proceeded. It was not a large one. Scarcely a dozen persons composed the followers of the simple bier; but there were flowers upon the dark pall, and tears of heartfelt grief had watered them.

Behind the funeral carriage, a small caleche was driven by an aged negro. In it were a young girl clad in plain but deep sable, and a man, who, by his garb, appeared to be a priest. Another vehicle followed, in which were seated two other persons, male and female. Under either vehicle, alternately, walked a large dog of the Newfoundland breed. He followed the body of his master. This funeral cortege was that which conveyed the body of Charles Ginton, the suicide, to his last home, and the mourners, few but real ones, were his young sister and her two servants, the faithful Yankee, Putnam Pomfret, and the clergyman, Padre Herrata.

Slowly, until they reached the gate of the quiet burial-place, the procession passed along. No word was spoken, but the priest held the trembling hand of the young sister within his own, and the maiden felt that the sympathy of a strong and tender nature was sustaining her spirit in its hour of trial.

At the entrance of the grave-yard, another hearse, followed by a single carriage, with but two persons in it, joined the cortege of the suicide, and together, for some time, the trains proceeded to their destination. Two open graves, nearly side by side, were to receive the bodies of two, who in life had been strangers, but were here to be united, to sleep quietly in the same earth till the time when the "corruptible shall put on incorruption." Padre Herrata, as the stranger hearse passed opposite to that which bore the remains of Ginton, recognized in one of the occupants of the solitary carriage which followed, a clergyman known to him as a most esteemed and worthy brother of his order. He addressed him with the customary salutation, at the same time pronouncing his name, Fray Pedro, and was responded to by a hearty "Peace be with you." At the same instant the eyes of the other person in the carriage, a young man of perhaps twenty years, who was clad in simple black, were raised slowly, and their gaze fell upon the face of the maiden who sat by the side of the priest Herrata.

At once a singular change was noticeable in the countenance of this young man. His cheeks, before pale as marble, became flushed with apparent excitement, his lips trembled, his eyes dilated. Padre Herrata noticed his agitation, and looked inquiringly toward Ray Peltro. The latter, however, was descending from the carriage, and did not catch the glance of his brother priest, but, so soon as he had alighted, took his station near the hearse, from which the undertaker and an assistant were now engaged in lifting the coffin. The same sad portion of the funeral duties was taking place at the other hearse. Handled, the negro, lifting one end of the coffin which inclosed the form that he had often supported in its childish days, in their happy American home, assisted the solemn-looking hearse-driver to bear it to the narrow grave, while Lucille, the meddler girl, and Pontret, stood silently by. Padre Herrata sustained the shrinking frame of the sister, with whom he had left the carriage, and thus the rites of burial proceeded, and two mortal bodies were consigned to their neighboring graves, while the mellow sunbeams slanted through the thick-leaved grove, and the birds sang thrillingly a requiem for the dead.

Nor were the warbling inhabitants of that grave yard the only choristers at the strangers' graves. Full and tenderly arose from the lips of the two priests that impressive chant for the dead which their church ritual enjoins particularly to be sung on the occasion of interring strangers. Up through the leafy arches of that glorious cathedral of nature, swelling and rolling amid the woody aisles, and sinking gently among the flowers and vines, the sad but beautiful melody of that funeral chant dispersed itself upon the quiet evening air. And, while tree and swart land grove were flooded with the golden sea of light that filled the western skies, and while the song of birds and requiem of priests arose together unto Heaven's throne, the mourners for the dead knelt down together—the young and old, the bond and free, and murmured their responses to the solemn music of the funeral hymn.

The graves were near each other—the beniers worked side by side as they cast the sods upon the coffins. Was it strange that, as the priests sang together, the two chief mourners for their respective dead should draw near unto one another? Was it strange, as the sister of Ginton, with eyes closed and heart commingling with her departed brother's memory, knelt beside his grave, that she should feel her hand pressed by another hand, and hear low sighs mingling with her own? She thought it was Padre Herrata who knelt near her, but in truth it was the young mourner who had followed the other hearse. His eyes were filled with tears, his breast heaved and sunk tumultuously, and uttering a low moan, he clasped the maiden's hand within his own, and raised it to his trembling lips.

At this moment the chant of the priests ceased the last sod

fell upon the graves, and the Padre Herrata, drawing near the young man, just as the wondering eyes of Ginton's sister opened upon her stranger companion, said, in a low voice:

"My children—do ye know one another?"

"Oh, indeed, indeed, it must be she!" was the hurried exclamation of the young man, as he hastily thrust his hand into his breast, and drew forth a small locket. Then opening its case, while the tearful eyes of Ginton's sister were fixed upon his face with a look, half of terror, half of interest, he disclosed the portrait of a young girl, which, in every lineament, seemed the "counterfeit presentment" of the maiden by his side.

"'Tis she—it must be she!" he murmured, wildly.

"What means this, brother?" asked Padre Herrata, turning to his fellow priest. "What youth is this, and what would he with this mourning maiden?"

Fray Pedro glanced for a moment at the picture which the young man held, and a sad len light broke over his features.

"I see—I see it all!" he cried. "Alonzo—speak! Did not this picture belong to your uncle—the good Don Tadeo who now lies at our feet?"

"Reverend father, it did. 'Twas the last gift that I received from my uncle's hands. It was the portrait of one whom—"

"I know it all, my son," rejoined the priest. "I was your uncle's confessor—his only confidant, save it might be yourself. That picture is the likeness of one whom Don Tadeo passionately loved in his youth, who died in a foreign land. You, brother Herrata, well know the sad story, though many years have passed since the unhappy Donna Maria Minas—"

"Donna Maria Minas!" interrupted the young girl, with a sudden start, as she heard the words pronounced. "It was my mother's name."

"None may doubt that who look upon this portrait of Donna Maria and then upon your face, my daughter," responded Fray Pedro. "Doubtless the hand of Heaven is in this meeting. Mark! this picture, long preserved as the dearest treasure of his existence, by one who cherished your mother's memory to the forgetfulness of all the world—"

"Save only me," cried Alonzo. "My generous uncle was ever to me all that a father could be."

"He was a just man," said the priest, solemnly, "and his reward is not to be doubted. Oh, Padre Herrata—"

This last exclamation was occasioned by the sudden discovery made by the good priest that the young maiden beside them had fallen into a state of insensibility. She still knelt upon the sward and clasped the portrait of Donna Maria in her hand, her eyes fixed upon it with an intense earnestness. But no rays of intelligence fell from them—they were fixed but expressionless. The unhappy child, overcome by conflicting emotions, had swooned as she gazed, and now, as the two clergymen looked toward her

they beheld that two ready assistants were supporting her sinking form—on one side was the Yankee, Pomfret, and on the other, the youth Alonzo.

"Dead—dead! Oh, no—she is not dead!" cried the latter, his countenance growing ghastly with apprehension.

"Let the gal hev air, or she will be," rejoined the Yankee, with his prompt understanding and quickness of action. "Gently there—she's only a-fainted—and, poor innocent, she's had a heap o' trouble—enough for one weak critter. Jes' stin' eside and she'll be all right again in a minute."

Saying this, the stalwart Pomfret with his right arm brushed every one aside, and lifting the maiden's slight figure in his left, as a mother would her babe, carried her in a moment from the grave to a smooth marble basin, where the dripping of a cool fountain was making music in unison with the song of birds.

Alonzo followed closely the Yankee's steps, while the two servants, Hannibal and Lucille, seized with dread that some new misfortune threatened their unhappy young mistress, gave way at once to violent grief, mourning and clasping their hands together, and calling upon their mistress to revive.

"Oh, Miss Teresa," cried Hannibal, passionately, sobs almost stifling his words, "don't-a go way from us—don't-a die, like Massa Charley—dat's a darlin' missy—don't-a die!"

And Lucille, running back and forth like one distracted, echoed the negro's plaints in her own half-broken exclamations:

"Oh, child! let *chère mistress*! Oh, what shall we do ourselves? Save my sweet mistress—*ma mignonette*—my dear Mademoiselle Teresa, and let *poivre* Lucille die once, three times—one dozen times."

"My good child, trust in God. He will not desert your mistress in this hour of trial," said Padre Herrata, striving to check the maiden's vehement grief. "Look! even now the maiden revives!—Yes! her eyes unclose to the light."

"*Al!—al!—al!*" "I am so glad!" cried the girl, a torrent of tears gushing from her eyes, while Hannibal uttered a loud cry of joy.

Mademoiselle Teresa had indeed opened her eyes, once more roused to animation by the cool water with which Pomfret had bathed her temples and sprinkled her pale face. But no consciousness appeared in the dim look which she cast around, it was evident she did not recognize any one.

"Faintest fear! the poor gal has taken it too hard," whispered the Yankee to Padre Herrata. "Her strength was almost gone when she got here, and this 'ere new business has over-ruled her mind completely. Poor little critter—she's as tender as a human' bird, an' no mistake."

Uttering these words, Pomfret ceased not to bathe the maiden's head with the cool fountain water; and Lucille, kneeling beside, clasped her hands and wrists, calling upon her mistress with the

most endearing names. At length the numbness which had terrified all so much, began to disappear from the young girl's frame, and a slight flush revisited her pallid cheeks.

Recovering in some degree, she was taken to the carriage, and they returned to the city. Pomfret, Alonzo and Fray Pedro followed in another carriage; on the way Pomfret recounted the story of Ginton's death. Alonzo listened with deep interest. Destiny had brought before him, on the occasion of his uncle's funeral, the daughter of her who was lost in his living thoughts.

CHAPTER VIII.

DON RICARDO RAMOS AND HIS STORY.

Two days had elapsed since the funeral of Don Tadeo and Ginton. Teresa, the desolate sister, after remaining for hours in the stupefaction into which she had fallen at her brother's grave, awoke, at length, to life with all its sad recollections and realities. The good Padre Herrata was unremitting in his kindly attentions, and the faithful servants, attached to their mistress by the strongest ties of early association and love for her gentle character, were untiring in their devotion to her service. The Yankee, whose position as regarded the favor of President Herrata had been made manifest to the officials on the occasion of their domiciliary visit, was permitted, as a countryman, to exercise the duties of an executor on such property as the deceased possessed at the time of his death. This, on examination, was discovered as both Padre Herrata and Pomfret had anticipated, to be scanty enough: for the unfortunate young man, involved in expenses during his brief sojourn in Mexico, and induced by his evil associates to risk his means on the uncertain chance of the gaming-table, had been stripped of the last dollar upon the fatal night which had witnessed his death. Save a few jewels possessed by Teresa herself, the furniture of their dwelling, and a small supply of money which the sister had retained, nothing remained of a considerable estate which a few months before had been the fortune of the two brothers.

Two years had passed since the death of that mother whose unhappy history has already been briefly narrated. When, wearied of the union which had made her life wretched, Donna Maria Falcone had fled from her home, and cast herself upon the wide world, she was yet innocent of infidelity against her husband. Though Falcone's character and habits had rendered her life insupportable, the unhappy wife had never cherished a thought of wrong. The sympathy and apparent devotedness of the young Don Tadeo had, it is true, awakened a responsive chord in her earnest nature, but she had not loved him. He

was to her, in the short period of their acquaintanceship, as a brother, in whose honor and affection she was conscious that she might rely, but no warmer feelings than those of a sister had ever entered into her heart.

But, young, inexperienced and unhappy, she had been worked upon by one whose life was as much stained with excess as even that of Falcone himself. Don Ricardo Ramos, the boon companion of her husband, had cast his evil eye upon the beautiful wife, and resolved to make her his victim. As insidious and cunning as he was bold and wicked, he sought to ingratiate himself in Donna Maria's favor, by all the arts in which he was an adept. With pretended sympathy, he hinted of the neglect with which Falcone evidently treated her—with affected indignation he wished that he could claim a brother's privilege to call him to account. He shrewdly made it appear that he sought to restrain Falcone in his evil courses, when, in reality, he was urging him constantly to the worst dissipation. Donna Maria at first lent an ear to the words of her husband's friend; and more readily, that a violent sickness which had attacked Don Tadeo, her youthful friend, had deprived her of the gentle support which his truthful character ever afforded her. She could not believe in such baseness as was a portion of Don Ricardo's very being, and consequently she admitted him to her society, and often to her confidence, until the villain, grown daring through her unsuspecting kindness, ventured to unveil his true design, and proposed that she should fly with him from the capital to one of his estates in eastern Mexico.

The first intimation of Don Ricardo's motives terrified the wife; but when, with crafty deliberation, he unfolded his schemes, and, as if secure of her compliance, proceeded to paint, in glowing colors, the life to which he would lead her, the pride of the woman roused her to resolution. She was of a high-spirited and ancient race. The blood of the Minas, her family, was reckoned as the *sangre azul* of old Spain, and it was the pride which could not brook their reduced fortunes that had induced her parents to give their child to the wealthy Falcone, albeit the latter boasted not a line like theirs. But Don Ricardo Ramos, rich though he was, had not the claims of birth to back his pretensions, since he was of the mixed race which claims as much affinity with the servile ranks of Mexico as with those who deem themselves the conquerors' descendants. This circumstance might, perhaps, have had little weight with Donna Maria, had her heart been interested in the man who addressed her; but she did not spurn the man from her presence—she did not appeal him with a look of lofty anger from her flashing eyes, nor pierce him with accents of withering contempt.

"Don Ricardo, you talk like a poet; you paint the future like an artist. A woman would be unreasonable to reject so enthusiastic a lover for a husband who neglects her."

Don Ricardo threw himself on his knees at the feet of Donna Maria, and seizing her hand, covered it with kisses.

Only one stipulation was made by the lovely woman—that until they should have arrived upon the lover's estates, near Monterey, no further mention must be made of love—no closer intimacy exist than that of the past. Don Ricardo regarded it as a whim, but Donna Maria was inexorable, and the arrangement was made. All things were prepared by the expectant lover—the lady secured her private jewels, kissed with tears the infant child of Falcone, which, though she loved not its father, was yet dear to her—and then gave her hand to Don Ricardo Ramos, for an elopement, while Falcone, absorbed in his worthless career, discovered not the double treachery of his wife and friend.

As the lover lifted the beautiful wife to her carriage, in which she had stipulated that she should ride alone, he attempted to kiss her lips, but she repulsed him.

"Don Ricardo—your promise!" she cried, gayly. "Will there not be time enough when we reach your home?"

So Don Ricardo Ramos contented himself with mounting his horse, and riding beside, and behind, and before the carriage, wherever he could catch a glimpse of the closely-veiled face of his lovely prize. Thus he escorted Donna Maria Falcone from the capital.

But all fine things have an end. One morning, when Don Ricardo arose betimes at the small hotel, where the horses had been put up for the night, and after glancing with a satisfied look at his traveling mirror, hurried to tender his morning salutation to the fair Donna Maria, and congratulate her upon their nearness to Monterey, which they should reach during the day—behold! Donna Maria was not to be found. His own horse was still in the stable, but the horses and carriage of the beautiful lady, as well as the lady herself, had disappeared.

"Where is she? In the fiend's name, answer!" cried Don Ricardo to the trembling host.

"The—lady?" stammered the man.

"You scorn me!—yes!" roared Don Ricardo.

The host did not know; she had ordered a relay of horses and departed during the night—did not desire that the gentleman should be disturbed, but had left a note for him.

"A note! The ladies—give it to me!"

It was brief, but quite explanatory.

"Don Ricardo Ramos:—I return thanks for your escort which I have accepted thus far upon my journey. You have been deceived in my character, as I was in yours. Though I am an unhappy woman, I can not be a guilty one. Farewell forever."

Don Ricardo Ramos stormed—took his horse and rode to his estates—scoured the country in every direction. But no

tidings did he gather of the fugitive, save that relays of horses had been taken to the confines of Texas. At Matamoras all trace was lost of Donna Maria Falcone.

So Don Ricardo returned to Mexico, to be accused of the elopement, and half-suspected of murder—to fight a duel with his friend Falcone, and receive a bullet in his body as a lasting memento of that affair—and finally, to leave his native country and become a wanderer in foreign lands, vainly seeking to discover the woman who had refused to become his mistress, and on whom he panted to revenge himself. But he saw Donna Maria no more.

And she—beautiful, proud and desperate—what destiny was in store for her? Truly, an exceeding common one, though in its outset romantic. Flying at once from her husband and Don Ricardo, she crossed the American border and reached a military station of the United States army. Here she found honorable protection, and became acquainted with a young Creole of New Orleans, who, with his sister, was about to return to the States. She gladly accepted the escort which they offered, and accompanied them upon their way. The young merchant became passionately enamored of her, and Donna Maria discovered that her own heart could love. She made a confidant of the merchant's sister, who was of a noble nature, and had grown warmly attached to her Mexican friend. The result was commonplace enough. Through his correspondents, the young lover learned of the death of Falcone, which occurred soon after their arrival at New Orleans. He proposed, was accepted, and Donna Maria Minas became Madame Ganton, and afterward the mother of two lovely children, one of whom we have seen die the death of a suicide, in the presence of his unknown brother, Gabriel Falcone, and the other a daughter, whom we left slowly recovering from the deadly swoon into which she had fallen at her unhappy brother's grave.

But if the union of Ganton and Donna Maria was commonplace, their life was a happy one. For nearly twenty years they dwelt together in elegant private life, not mingling with the world, but content in their own really enjoyment. Maria looked back upon her brief relationship to Falcone as a sad dream from which she had soon awakened. At times, the mother's heart reverted to her child, deprived of her maternal care, and often she regretted that she had not taken the babe with her upon her abrupt departure. But she recollected that, under the circumstances, such a thing was impossible. To escape with a lover, while she yet possessed a husband's child to her bosom, would have seemed hypocrisy, and though never exactly plotting other than the step actually taken, still she had known beforehand how fraught it was with danger, and how could she have imperiled the life of her innocent babe in her own wild expedition? But it was past—she had become another's wife,

and she strove to banish the recollection of the single tie which linked her to her native land.

Thus years fled swiftly by, and the two children of Maria's second marriage, Charles and Teresa, grew up lovingly bested to their parents. How many, how bright, were the hopes linked around the fair young brother and sister! How often the husband and his foreign wife fondly speculated upon the time when they should become old, and their offspring, young and beautiful, sustain and gladden their declining years!

But such was not to be. Reverses came suddenly upon the merchant Ginton. Disastrous seasons affected his affairs, and at length, from wealth, he speedily found himself reduced to little more than a competency. He grieved not for this on his own account, nor did Maria; but they loved their children, and with natural pride, desired to leave them in the style to which they had been accustomed from infancy. But as this desire could no longer be gratified, Ginton gathered the wreck of his possessions, and investing the greater portion for the benefit of his children, set himself once more at work, to build up with the remainder a new fortune for himself. At this crisis, another blow fell upon him. The annual epidemic which so cruelly afflicts New Orleans, made its appearance just at the season when Ginton's affairs were beginning to take an auspicious turn. It snatched the mother amid her children, and by her husband's side. It deprived him of his Maria, and with her he lost hope itself. Ginton did not survive the loss of his wife.

"He tried

"To do without her—liked it not—and died."

in one short month the two slept side by side, and Charles and Teresa were orphans.

At this period the brother was at college—the sister at school. They remained in their respective positions till their education was completed, and then received the small portion which had been secured for them by their father's timely provision. It amounted to but ten thousand dollars, but Teresa was confident that it would be a great fortune for them, at least till her brother, on whom she relied, should retrieve, by his efforts, all that her parents had lost. Alas! the hopes of youth!

Charles Ginton had often heard his mother speak of her native land, though he, like Teresa, was unconscious of the early events of her history. Nevertheless, the associations of the descriptions he had in childhood listened to from Donna Maria's lips, had given him an earnest desire to behold America, and, consequently, when, with his sister, they prepared for themselves a future course of life, the idea of a short visit to the neighboring republic was first among his suggestions. Teresa, who believed her brother's judgment infallible, at once assented to Charles' proposal, the more readily as he assured her that he designed making such arrangements as would enable him, on

his return, to pursue his father's business as a consignee of the Mexican and Indian traders. Thus the two children, for they were little more, left their native New Orleans, and set out on their ill-fated visit to the capital of Mexico. What afterward occurred need not be dwelt upon. Ginton, possessed of engaging manners and apparently wealthy, soon found himself immersed in the gay life of Mexican young men—he became acquainted with Gabriel Falcone—was led into dissipation and play, and became

“A thing
O'er which the raven flaps his funeral wing.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLOOD OF THE MINAS.

Two days, as we have said, had elapsed since the funeral of Charles Ginton, and in that time Patman Pomfret had ascertained the exact state of the surviving orphan's worldly affairs. With his habitual calculation, he knew that what little cash and effects, save her jewels, Teresa possessed would be barely sufficient to defray the expenses of her journey home; and the two slaves, Hannibal and Lucille, had they not been already emancipated by the Mexican laws, he knew would never be disposed of by their gentle mistress. Consequently they must be provided for, and our Yankee was not himself rich in personal means, though his shrewd business tact was already making itself felt in many commercial circles of Mexico.

Patman Pomfret, finding himself in Mexico, with little else than his native thrills, and some services which it had been his good fortune to render to the existing government, as his capital had nevertheless managed, through the assistance of some influential Mexican friends, to organize a profitable trading business, which, requiring his supervision alone, was now bringing him steady and increasing returns for skill and enterprise. At the present time he discovered that his presence in an eastern portion of the republic might be of advantage to himself in point of profit, and it required not much consideration on the part of the worthy North American, to discern that it was his particular duty to see his young countrywoman escorted safely to her distant American home. Therefore, with as much real knight errantry as ever existed in the days of chivalry, our hero constituted himself the defender and protector of the orphan beauty, and forthwith took under his direction, not only all preparations for the journey, but the care and expense of the lady's household itself. In this quality of executor,

Pomfret possessed an undoubted right to act in this manner, though few would have asserted such right accompanied as it was with constant pecuniary personal expense. Pomfret, however, as disinterested as he was unpretending, used his executorship only as a plausible covering for his concealed generosity. He knew very well, that, while Teresa would shrink from receiving benefits at the hands of a stranger, she could very well be induced to believe that, as executor, he was but providing supplies from her deceased brother's effects.

"And how on airth," quoth the Yankee, to himself, "how on airth am I goin' to administer, unless I get something to administer with? That gal and those niggers are bound to live, and while Putnam Pomfret's got a dollar, he ain't a-goin' to let a lady suffer—pertick'ly when that 'ere lady is a countrywoman, and a derved sight better than any o' these Mexican feminines that ride round the market, jes' like yaller angels. Jehoshaphat!"

In accordance with this resolution of the indomitable Yankee, every thing went on as formerly in the dwelling of Teresa Ginton. The servants went regularly about their duties, at the same time making the necessary preparations for leaving the city; and Putnam, without parade or assumption, quietly constituted himself a "business committee of one," as he jocosely expressed it, to make every thing about the young mistress as comfortable as possible.

Padre Herrata observed all this, for the priest well knew the character of his American friend, and also the state of the unfortunate Ginton's affairs. He smiled approvingly, as he noticed the methodical manner in which Pomfret attended to all that was necessary, and pressing the latter's hand, said, in his fervent manner:

"Señor Pomfret, you are a noble heart, and I esteem you more as I know you better. Heaven has truly blessed me in the friends it has given me."

"Padre, you jes' talk so, because you're good yourself. I ain't a-doin' more than my duty, and I take it we're all Christians, and headin' for the same heaven."

"It would be well if some of the crowned and mitred lords of earth were as sure of reaching there as this American," murmured Padre Herrata to himself, as he turned away.

Alonso Vallejo, the nephew of Don Talbo, after his return from the funeral where he had become so strangely impressed with the daughter of his uncle's cherished friend, remained in a state of mind entirely new to him. He would not that his thoughts dwell not so much upon his recent loss as upon the singular revelations it had caused. The image of the beautiful Teresa, as he had beheld her kneeling by her brother's grave, and then reposing, pale and deathly, upon the breast of the faithful Lucille, presented itself constantly before his memory,

and he tortured himself with apprehensions concerning her safety. Early on the following morning he was at the house into which he had beheld her borne still wrapped in stupor, and there learned from his new acquaintance, Patnam, the state of the maiden's health. He lingered long that day, and again in the evening he presented himself. Thus, for two days, the young man, feeling that love for the almost unknown girl was henceforth to be a part of his being, pondered upon his uncle's sad story, and tenanted his imagination with a thousand unique uncertainties.

"Ah!" he cried, as he paced up and down the floor of the apartment which had been the studio of his revered relative, "ah! if she should love another, I feel that my uncle's fate will be mine."

But on the evening of the second day, on reaching the house of Teresa, Alonzo was informed by Hannibal that his mistress was so far recovered as to be at that moment sitting in an inner parlor of the house, opening upon the small garden attached to its rear.

"And a gentleman is wid nissy," added the negro.

"A gentleman?" cried Alonzo, starting. "Ah, a friend of the family—Senor Pomfret, probably."

"Gorra, no! Massa Pomfret gone 'way to-night 'long wid Padre Herrata, but he say he be back soon. Dis am no friend of anybody. Gorra! I wish he head brake—dis gentleman."

"He is evidently no friend of yours, Hannibal," said Valljo, smiling at the negro's frankness, though more than ever alarmed lest the gentleman in question might prove to be a favored admirer of Teresa. "Will he remain long with your mistress?"

"I think not," answered Hannibal. "Missy Teresa no like him nuther."

This piece of information greatly relieved poor Alonzo, so he quickly took a seat, in order to await the appearance of the Yankee, while Hannibal departed to attend to his duties. In the meantime, we will take the liberty of introducing the reader to the little inner parlor of the dwelling occupied by Teresa Gilman, where that lady now reclined upon a sofa, near the open window. She was very pale. A loose white robe, modestly trimmed with narrow lace, and clasped across the bosom with a small brooch, in which was a portrait of her brother, concealed, but could not conceal, the graceful symmetry of her form. Her hair, parted over the wide brow, hung in thick ringlets upon her shoulders, in one cluster of which her left hand had buried itself, supporting her beautiful head. Her right pressed tightly against her heart, which was beating with evident excitement. Her eyes were tearless and very bright.

Opposite to her sat General Filmore, his eyes riveted upon hers with a look which was manifestly intended to express much tender sympathy, but to which the dissipated features of the

young man imparted an uncertain and not attractive character. But his voice was low and alluring.

"I loved your poor brother deeply, Senora. I appreciated his noble qualities—his earnestness of nature—"

"His cruel, cold nature, which made him too easily your slave, sir," cried Teresa, her voice quivering with repressed passion. "Oh that Charles had never entered this infamous city; he would not then have fallen into a heartless villain's snare."

Falcone looked with amazement upon the young girl, for he had never heard such harsh language from her at any time before. He bit his lips, in the effort to preserve his own grave demeanor, and answered:

"Truly, the Senora is unjust to one who esteemed her brother—who would serve herself."

"I esteem my brother—serve me!" exclaimed Teresa, slightly elevating her voice, but altering not otherwise her manner. "Senor Falcone, you can serve me best by speaking no more of this, and leaving me at once and forever."

"Nay, Senora," murmured the unblinded Falcone, in his singularly mellow tones, "I should be false to my esteem for him, and untrue to my deep respect for you, could I neglect my duty at this time. Do not condemn me that I sympathize with you, Senora Clinton—so lovely, so unfortunate—"

"Cease, sir. This is no time nor place for flatteries!" cried Teresa, suddenly rising from the couch on which she had partially reclined, and folding her hands upon her bosom.

She spoke in a voice of determination, and her eyes, dilating into brilliancy, were fixed undeviatingly upon the intruder. So might have looked her mother, Donna Maria, upon the man who reproached her dishonor, had she not chosen to conceal her indignation. But the blood of the Minas was in the veins of both, and though Teresa's glance dwelt so fully upon his bold countenance, the eye of Gabriel Falcone fell not, nor changed from its look of seeming sensibility.

"Senor Falcone, I am young, and the ways of the world are unfamiliar to me. I know not what wicked propensities in your heart led you to tempt my trusting brother to his ruin. I know not what new design of evil you may harbor against an orphan girl. But, in my soul, Senor Falcone, I feel that on your hands lies the blood of Charles Clinton. You, Senor, enticed, betrayed him to his fate. But for you he had been innocent, and I had not been desolate."

The maiden covered her eyes, as she said this, with both her hands, while her breast heaved tumultuously. Falcone, startled as he was by selfishness and dissimulation, could not for the moment recover his usual manner sufficiently to reply, and Teresa, collecting her thoughts, continued:

"Now, sir, be satisfied with the misery you have caused. I implore you to insult me not with your compassion. Depart

from this house, Senor Falcone, and let me forget that you exist, ere my memory urges me to curse your name."

Teresa stood before the Florentine with all her mother's pride legible upon her features, yet tempered with a sadness that made its exhibition still more impressive. But Falcone was not to be thus repulsed.

"Senora," he rejoined, blandly, "it would be impious for me to believe that such gentle lips could utter a curse—"

"Have I not said that this is no period for flattery? Senor Falcone, hear from these lips that I hate—despise you! Hear when I declare that the bitterness of my brother's death, is that caused by following one so base as you. Now, sir, away! Dare no longer to pollute the air which he breathed with your false-hearted words. Go! or my menials shall hear me utter my contempt!"

The young girl's form swelled into majesty with the indignation which filled her spirit, and Falcone, while he writhed under the evident loathing which she manifested, could not but feel that she was a woman born to awaken admiration and respect. Nevertheless, with the hardihood which formed a large portion of his character, he did not even then despair of softening the obduracy of her feelings toward him; for Falcone believed himself skilled in all the ways of womanhood, and smiled within himself at the thought that such a child as Teresa could be proof against his art and experience. Therefore, though the last words of the maiden grated harshly on his ear, he neither chose to answer them nor comply with their requisitions. He silently let his glance fall suddenly upon the floor, and leaning his forehead upon the open palm of his hand, seemed for a moment absorbed in abstracted meditation.

Teresa remained standing, her slight but erect form scarcely supported by the window frame against which she partly leaned. Her eyes still rested upon Falcone's face, and the scorn which had a moment since wreathed her delicately-chiseled lip yet gave a determined expression to all her features.

At length, as if by a quick impulse, Falcone sprung suddenly to a the chair on which he sat, and throwing himself upon one knee before the young girl, clasped both her hands within his own, before she could make a movement to prevent the action. Then, speaking in a hurried whisper, while unfeigned sincerity beamed from his passionate eyes, the young gamester proceeded with an energy of resolve that constrained Teresa's attention before she could control her faculties.

"Listen to me, Senora," cried Gabriel Falcone. "You ~~shall~~ hear me! I love you—passionately, madly love you! Think you that with such a feeling in my heart, I could have meditated aught against your brother's safety—against your peace of mind? No! by all the saints, I mourn as deeply as yourself the loss of one so dear to both of us. Senora! Senora! drive me

not to despair—urge me not to become all you declared me to be! I love you, I adore you. Beware ere you rouse within my nature other and different feelings—”

Falcone paused, for he caught the bright eye of Teresa fixed on his with a look of such defiant scorn that it almost seemed to burn into his soul. The daughter of Donna Maria Minnis had forgotten her weakness, her suffering, her sorrow. With every feature rigid in marble beauty, with nostrils swollen and lips compressed, while the light that blazed from her glorious eyes seemed to irradiate her entire countenance, she towered a moment before the gambler's vision, and then, thrusting her hand beneath her white robe, where it was clasped over her bosom, drew forth a long, thin-bladed dagger, which she uplifted suddenly, its point aimed at the heart of the villain.

The young gambler was brave and confident, but the suddenness of Teresa's action startled him. He immediately sprung to his feet, and retreated a step from the threatening weapon. But a moment afterward he seemed to be ashamed of his apparent timidity, and with a smile that partook as much of bitterness as humor, stretched out his hand, as if playfully to put the stiletto aside.

“Beware, Senor—I trifle not. Go!” cried the unmoved maiden, pointing to the door.

Falcone laughed, and dextrously advancing his hand, seized the maiden's wrist, and compressed it so harshly that a loud cry escaped her lips.

“Ah, pretty one, you can not harm me now,” cried the young man, mockingly.

But scarcely had the cry which she uttered left Teresa's lips, when the door of the apartment was opened, and the figure of a young man appeared upon the threshold. It was Alonzo Valljo. A single glance sufficed to discover to the youth the position of Teresa Ginton, though he knew not who was her companion. The dagger, still clasped in the maiden's hand, while her wrist was compressed by the stranger's grasp, and from which she was struggling to free herself, her look of mingled scorn and terror, satisfied Alonzo at once that the other gentleman was no welcome guest in the house. So, without staying a second for farther information as to the merits of the case, our young student sprung forward at once, and dealt a heavy blow at the forehead of Falcone, which made the gambler not only release his hold, but reel, for a moment, like a drunken man.

“Senora—Senora! are you hurt?” cried Valljo, in great agitation, as he turned to look upon the maiden, without attempting to think any farther upon the man whom he had struck. But Teresa Ginton, more watchful than her defender, saw that Falcone was about to rush upon his assailant.

“Take care!” she exclaimed, suddenly, and threw herself

forward, with the stiletto raised in her hand, just at the instant when the infuriated gamester was about to attack the student. "Back! Senor!" she cried, interposing herself between Falcone and the young man. "Unmanly as you are, I permit you to go unsettled; but go at once!"

Gabriel Falcone's features writhed with passion, and the foam gathered on his lips.

"Is this the favored one?" he cried, hoarsely. "How many lovers has the virtuous Teresa concealed?"

Alonzo Vallejo heard the taunt, and springing before the fair girl who had interposed herself between them, struck once more at the face of the gamester, grasping, at the same time, his neckcloth. Falcone was of stouter build, and stronger in reality than the young student, but the energy of the latter's assault bore him backward toward the open door, through which he would in a moment more have been precipitated, had he not succeeded in gripping firmly the other's arm, and thus impeding the exercise of his muscles. Then, gathering his own strength, he bent suddenly and cast the student violently upon the floor. The next moment Falcone drew a dagger and lifted it above Vallejo's breast—but not before the brave Teresa Ginton had discovered the murderous intention. Quick as thought she sprung forward, and seizing the gamester's hand, turned his weapon aside, while her own stiletto threatened him in turn. But at this moment a gentle pressure upon her head caused her to look up, and she beheld the mild face of Padre Herrata, who, with Pomfret, had just entered the apartment.

"Don't kill the cuss—he ain't worth it," cried the Yankee. "Jehosaphat!" he continued, looking admiringly upon the maiden, while, with all the equanimity imaginable, he inserted his fingers beneath the collar of Falcone's coat and unceremoniously dragged that gentleman from the prostrate Vallejo. "Jehosaphat! Miss Teresa—you're clear grit, an' no mistake. Reg'lar American spunk, by king-lem! Who's afraid, I'd like to know, when our girls can protect themselves so fashion? Here, you black-muzzled, yaller-skinned chap, I dunno who you are, or where you come from nuther, but jes' you walk Spanish this time, an' if you want to settle, call on Putnam Pomfret."

So saying, while Alonzo Vallejo arose to his feet, and Teresa, clinging to Padre Herrata, seemed about to relapse into the deadly state from which she had so lately recovered, the imperious Yankee, confining Falcone as with an iron grasp, thrust him forcibly out of the room, and through the outer apartment, to the open hall-door, where stood the negro Hannibal. Here, releasing him, he said, quietly:

"You know my name, and somethin' of my natur'. So good-by, and keep your distance."

Falcone ground his teeth together, and cast a malignant look upon the unmoved Yankee. Then clutching his hat and cane,

which the grinning negro extended to him, he rushed from the house.

"Gorra! dat am de ticket?" cried Hannibal, clasping his hands delightedly, when the Yankee had returned to the inner room. "Dat Massa Pomfret ain't 'frail de debil hisself. Oh, Missy Lucille! what for you no be here, for see the fail?" he asked of the mulatto girl, who now made her appearance. "Massa Falcone he get he walkin' papers. Gorra maby, how he go?"

"*Ma foi!*" returned the girl. "Do you think I not see him? *Mon dieu!* I am full of fear he will come back and kill us all. *O ciel!*"

"Nebber you fear! Massa Pomfret eat him up, like draw o' bacca. Gorra! He make on's one mouf ful ob Massa Falcone."

CHAPTER X.

THE ACTORS IN A COMING DRAMA.

THE position of public affairs in the Mexican republic, at the point to which our story has arrived, was exceedingly critical. The administration was far from being secure; for a large party existed adverse to the temporizing policy pursued by President Herrera, and ready for a change of rule even through revolution. Consequently, Putnam Pomfret whose residence in Mexico had made him tolerably familiar with the political harlequinades continually going on, was not unprepared for a communication made to him by Fahe Herrera at their next meeting.

"General Herrera has resigned, and a new government enters on the the field at once," was the substance of the information imparted by the priest.

"Then, I callate General Herrera's documents are at a discount," said Pomfret.

"What do you mean, sir, by his documents?"

"Oh, nuthin' extry. Only, as I sort o' suspicioned that Herrera wouldn't hold on to the helm, when squalls were coming, and as that fightin' General Pareles 'll mor'n likely come next, you see, I callated 'twas best to git our walkin' papers from Herrera and start for the frontier, short order. You know, pore, that Mister Pareles ain't best friends with neither you nor me, and he'll be jest likely to upset all our apple cars, if he once gits here in the capital. What d'ye say about that, pore?"

"I admire your forethought, good friend," responded the priest. "It would be no easy matter for us, or any of Herrera's friends, to procure a favor from General Pareles, though I trust the new administration will be a patriotic and an able one. So I rejoice to hear that you procured President Herrera's sign-

kanusi, to your passports. For a short time, at least, it will be respected."

"Here are the passes, signed and sealed for Putnam Pomfret and Sonora Ginton, family and servant," answered the Yankee. "So you see, padre, you can just go along, as one of the family."

"Yes," said the priest, pausing, thoughtfully, "we may have other enemies specially on our track. Are you aware that the young man whom you encountered yesterday is a known partisan of Paredes?"

"That ~~enraged~~ Falcone! he be durned! Ask pardon, padre, but he ain't worth shucks, for an enemy!"

"Be not too confident, my good friend. Times like the present place power in strange hands. But do you know who this young man is?"

"I can't care if he sneaks round that poor gal any more, I'll let him know who Putnam Pomfret is!" returned the North American, shaking his head. "However, padre, let's know who'n time that varment is, anyhow—"

The priest was about to speak, when the appearance of a third person at the open door of the room caused him to rise hastily, and advance to meet the new-comer, who approached with like eagerness, and with both hands extended.

"Anselmo! my noble boy! cried Padre Herrata, folding the visitor in his arms, while Pomfret grasped one of his hands, and wrung it energetically.

"Capt'g Zumozin, by thunder!" and there ain't a mortal man this side of the States that I'd gi' more to see, now I tell ye!"

The stranger thus heartily welcomed returned the Yankee's greeting with equal warmth, while replying to the affectionate interrogations of Padre Herrata, whose eyes dwelt upon his lovely figure with the admiration of a parent.

Anselmo Zumozin was indeed an object of interest, as he stood before his friends—his fine form, erect and graceful, towering over both. Sinewy and majestic, yet flexible, the limbs and power of this young man seemed alike capable of action and endurance. He was clad in a light suit of green cloth, half soldier's and half hunter's, as if he had just stepped, like a prince, from some forest thicket. A woven hat, with an eagle feather in its band, crowned his regal head, that was profusely covered with curls of glossy black. Altogether, Anselmo Zumozin was a hero for women to love and for rivals to envy.

"But you are pale, my son. You bring not the brown hue of health from your western home."

"I must seek it elsewhere—perhaps in foreign lands," answered the young man, with a sad expression.

"You are unhappy, Anselmo," said the padre, tenderly. "I will not ask you why—perhaps I do not need to ask. But why do you speak of foreign travel? The present is no time to leave your native land."

"Are, then, the rumors that I heard on my way hither, to be believe'd—that the republic is threatened from abroad?"

"The countrymen of our friend Pomfret are covetous of the spoils left by Montezuma," answered Padre Herrata, with a smile. "Is it not so, Senor?" he inquired of the Yankee.

"Well, I can't say," replied Pomfret, "and if Minister Schell goes him mad, there'll be the doose to pay in Washington. Our people are not on hand to manage when they're rix?"

"And under the sway of a war party here," rejoined the priest, "who can hope that a conflict can be averted? But, in any event," continued Padre Herrata, clasping Zoro's hand again, "there is but one course for you, my son—Mexico may need defense alike against internal and foreign foes."

"And I s'pose my best course is just to make a dash for the Rio Grande or Vera Cruz, quicker'n chain lightning," exclaimed the Yankee. "There's mighty few of your Mexican countrymen I'd cotton to, anyhow. There's Captain Zoro here, and yourself, padre, and that ar' Captain Nunez who's a colonel now, I callate, I allow you're all tricks, and I'd stay by you, ag'in the world! As you say, padre, Captain Zoro is bound for to fight his country's battles, and there stay I reckon in time, no matter what's the scrimmage! But by the way—" ejaculated Pomfret, suddenly brushing his claws across his eyes, to hide their moisture, while he seized both of Zoro's hands in his own—"I'd like to hear of any harm coming to you or Captain Nunez. Thunder! I hope there won't be any war, arter all."

"Let us pray that there may not be," said Padre Herrata, solemnly. "But, Anselmo my son, your arrival is unexpected. How is the Senor Montagnone, your father?"

"In good health and here in the city," replied Zoro. "He accompanied me hither, and desired proceeding forward to Vera Cruz, whence we had nearly determined to embark for the United States."

"You will now, I think, after your intention, my son. Whatever may be the form in which it shall come, certain it is that danger threatens our country. Much have I heard, Anselmo, of your noble acts upon your estates—of the improvement and cultivation of your tenants, the civilization of the Indian population, and—"

"Say not civilization, Padre Herrata," interrupted Zoro, "at least not such civilization as is manifested in this unhappy capital, with its brigands and desperadoes. No, my father, if I have influenced the wild tribes who inhabit the regions around Montagnone, it has been, thank Heaven, to cause them to cherish more devotedly the independence which they inherit from the unconquered race of Aztlán. I have not yoked these free children of nature like oxen to the plow, confining them to corn-planting, that their hunting-grounds might be made spoil for

speculation. I have not poisoned them with fiery drinks, nor taught them avarice and theft, and falsehood—lessons too early learned, too long practiced, by the wretched tribes of these lower districts. No, Padre Herrero, the northern Indians with whom I sojourn, eating at their boards, and sleeping peacefully in their humble cabins, look upon Zumozin, not as a trader, or a government agent, nor propagandist of new creeds; but as a man, like themselves, paying their miseries, recognizing their faults, and strengthening their hopes."

The speaker paused, checking with an effort the enthusiasm that had led him to speak earnestly upon a subject which of all others interested him most; for Zumozin's sympathy with the poorer Indian tribes was not the effect of philanthropy alone. Himself a child of the ancient race, a descendant of the Aztec princes, whose blood so freely ran in defence of their country's expiring independence, when the foot of the haughty Spaniard trampled the bright towers of Tezcuco, it is no marvel that the accumulated wrongs which had reduced the aboriginal inhabitants to a state of degradation noticeable among nearly all the native population of Lower Mexico furnished a theme for his thoughts at all times, and often led him into eloquent expression of those thoughts. Dwelling of late among the yet unarmed people who inhabited the almost impenetrable wildernesses of the *terracalce*, he had formed a plan, generous, it is true, by enthusiasm, but not at all impracticable, of uniting the scattered and dissimilar tribes, who owned a common country, into a warlike, disciplined nation, federated by a single object, the preservation of their rude independence.

In his own character, Zumozin combined much that was requisite for the successful prosecution of a scheme like this. Well read and educated, he could avail himself of all the experimental lore of history in adapting his project to the rude comprehension of his savage friends—brave and enduring, he won their respect by deeds which rivaled their own—grave in speech, and a master of the Indian tongue, he could move their council to smiles or tears; and added to these qualities, he was recognized and revered by the most potent of the tribes as a true scion of the ancient kindly race who once ruled the empire of Tenochatlan. And when Zumozin, garbed in the romantic costume of the long-perished Aztec people, and crowned with a diadem of eagles' plumes, stood amid the assembled warriors of those stern northern tribes, and spoke, in their native language, words of hope and inspiration—truly he seemed to these rude men the embodiment of majesty.

"Oh, children of our dead mother, Aztlán!" he would cry out, stretching his arms above their bowed heads, "why are ye scattered like forest leaves, driven before the wind? Why are ye spoiled of your inheritance, and the land which your fathers held made now the footstool of strangers? Behold! ye are

numerous like the oaks of the wood; ye have strength and stand erect like them. But the ax of the jealous-drinking Spaniard will soon be at the roots of the oak; and his holy trunk must fall—its branches must be gathered and burned at the stranger's camp-fire."

Then, raising his voice, as he marked the despondent looks which followed his sad prediction, Zamozin would begin a strain of enthusiastic hope.

"Children of Aztlan—despair not! Ye are many—ye are strong. Come up together in concert! let the tribes in a war send their young men and their wise chiefs. Let the Indian no longer lift his hand against an Indian, but join in the great feast of union. Let us learn how the Spaniards march on the war-path. Let us have captains and an army like the strangers, and be together a great nation once more. Then shall we build up cities like our Aztec fathers, and the red warriors of the land shall come to us, asking shelter beneath our power. And we will unite all the tribes from the mountains to the sea, and be as one warrior and one wise chief, possessing the land forevermore, even as our fathers of Aztlan. Bebold, children! the spirits of the dead look down upon us, and I hear their words, crying: 'Join! join! descend into Aztlan! join and become a great and mighty people.'"

With such harangues had Zamozin unfolded to the tribes among whom he sojourned, the plan of an Indian confederacy that might succeed in arresting the decay which he knew too well must be the fate of all the race, should they in their present divided state, become more intimately known to the encroaching white man. The craft and violence which had reduced the aboriginals of the *tierra caliente* to a condition abject and deplorable in the extreme, would be equally ruinous to the yet uncorrupted denizens of the upper regions as yet the city of Mexico, just so soon as the marauding adventurers and traders should become sufficiently numerous to warrant their customary methods of tampering. The object of Zamozin, therefore, was, by some wise plan of confederation, to consolidate the remaining families and remnants of nations into a powerful people, formidable in point of numbers, and governed by such regulations as would exempt them from being disciplined in military science, and taught the rudiments of a sound national education. The scheme was not Utopian; in fact, it was one which promised important results, and which, if devised at any period before the Spanish had corrupted the unhappy natives, might have preserved the latter from much of the misery which is now their lot in the interior of Mexico.

Such a plan of confederation had been already twice conceived by purely savage intellect among the Atlantic tribes, and failed only because of its being too late in execution to reach its object—once in the early history of the New England Colonies, when

King Philip's war threatened total annihilation to the English, and, in later times, when Tecumseh rallied the tribes, and fought the last good fight of the savage against the white man. In both of these original schemes of union, the lack of success arose simply from their having been devised too late, when the whites were become too powerful to resist.

Pontreil had listened to the earnest words of his friend Zeamozin with a countenance that showed how fully he appreciated the noble impulses which gave birth to them; and he rejoined, with a glistening eye:

"Crying, you're a brick, an' deserve to be President o' this creddled rotten republic in jes' about no time, now I tell ye. If you want to bring about the red elevation o' yaller skins, jes' you farn 'em to respect themselves, and make 'em feel that an Injun's good as a white man, if he's decent. A man's a man, and by jingo, they owned the land before any white feller ever set foot on't. 'Tain't fair to drive 'em clean out o' their own shanties, by thunder."

"Let us hope that the age of persecution is passing away," said Padre Herrata. "No nation is secure that is intolerant."

"True as gospel," ejaculated the Yankee. "But what course will our new government take, if it be true that Paredes is to have dictatorial authority?"

"I know not that such authority will be allowed him," answered Padre Herrata, "but this we must expect—war on the part of the United States, and civil war in Mexico."

"And who will wage the civil war?"

"A dozen ambitious chieftains, anxious for power—men who could be controlled but by one master-spirit, popular alike with the people and the army."

"You mean Santa Anna."

"You understand me, Anselmo. But, alas! the General dwells ingloriously abroad, when his country demands his services here."

"He hates the Americans!"

"More bitterly even than Paredes, who, besides, is not popular with the soldiers. If we would avert civil war, Santa Anna must return."

"But how? His life might be the forfeit. Remember Purbird and Guerrero."

"The army will protect him, and Paredes must yield the command of that, in order to secure himself from a host of jealous rivals."

"It is true—Santa Anna must return."

"Go, then, Anselmo, at once to Vera Cruz, as was your intention. Embark for Havana, where Santa Anna now waits, and tell him that his presence is needed in Mexico. He will return with you."

"But if in the mean time war should break out?"

"What better service can you accomplish, my son, than to bring another defender to our country? Santa Anna is ambitious; but ambition in one man is better than anarchy and dissension among all our chiefs. Anselmo, follow my counsel, as you love Mexico! Senor Pomfret and myself leave at once for the frontier. Go you at once to Santa Anna."

"I will, my father!" cried Zamozin, rising and taking the priest's hand. "Farewell! we shall soon meet again. And you, my brave American," continued the Mexican youth as Pomfret came forward for a parting embrace, "if all your nation and all my countrymen were just and loyal as yourself, the name of war would never be breathed in their councils. Farewell, my friend! and may we yet greet each other under less gloomy auspices."

With these words, Zamozin departed, leaving his two friends to arrange all things for their contemplated journey from the capital. In the mean time, we must return to other actors in our drama of history and life.

The news of Taylor's occupation of the eastern bank of the Rio Grande had just reached the capital of Mexico, and had been made the subject of a public proclamation which was placarded throughout the city. It was considered as the initiative of war. Whatever might have been the numbers or vitality of the peace party of Mexico a few weeks before, ere yet Herrera's administration had succumbed to the demands of popular belligerency, there was very little manifestation of pacific feeling by an assemblage at the market-place. All lips breathed hostility to the invader, albeit some were pale in so doing. Anathemas without stint were hurled at the perfidious nation which, it was asserted, had wantonly provoked and pushed to extremity the quarrel, in the lust for aggrandizement and territory. Many priests mingled with the laymen of the crowd, exhorting the latter to die, if necessary, in their country's defense, and to pay out their last dollar to support a righteous cause; but none of these religious gentlemen offered of themselves to furnish contributions, though it was well known that the revenues of the State were insignificant compared with those of the church. However, if wanting in liberality, the good clergy lacked not in zeal, and dispensed the blessings of the church very generously, if they did not its funds.

Aside from the crowd, conversing in an animated manner, walked two individuals with whom the reader is already acquainted. They did not appear to be so much occupied with the general subject of excitement, as with their own personal matters.

"By St. Iago! whoever this villain of an American be, I shall not sleep well 'ill I triumph over him," muttered the younger

of the two colloquists, clinching his teeth as he spoke, and frowning ominously.

"You have your father's temper, Falcone," cried his companion. "But who and what is this American?"

"I know nothing of him, further than that he rendered some service to the late administration, and was in favor with Herrera. He is called Senor Pomfret, and rumor says, he assisted in dispersing the brigand band of Joaquin Marani, some time since; a bold fellow, that Marani, who attacked a government *condado*. It is not long before he was taken."

"And a priest, Padre Herrata—was not such a one mentioned in connection with the capture of Marani?"

"You know all about it."

"Doubtless! I have a good memory, and readily recall the circumstance. Moreover, I will tell you something else. The government *condado* which the brigand attacked was designed, if captured, to supply the troops of General Paredes, then in revolt. This American and the priest, by preventing the plunder, saved Herrera's government from pecuniary ruin. You understand me, Falcone?"

"I think so."

"Consequently Herrera became a friend to both the worthy gentlemen. But that is no reason Paredes should remember them with gratitude. You understand me now, Falcone?"

"Perfectly, Don Ricardo."

"Your path, then, is open. Paredes knows you for his friend, and I will give you full authority as regards not only this American and the priest, but as to all connected with them. Doubtless you understand me now, my dear Gabriel Falcone."

Don Ricardo laughed in his singular manner, as he quietly gave utterance to these words, the effect of which on his hearer was powerful. Falcone stopped short in his walk, and seized his associate's hand.

"Don Ricardo," he cried, "you are the devil, I believe, for knowing every thing. I see clearly what you would have me do, and I will at once to the President."

"He will give you a commission, doubtless, which you can turn to account, my dear Gabriel. But, now, a word with you. This lovely maiden, Ginton's sister—she will very probably require new protection. Would she scorn to accept my hospitality till—"

Falcone looked in Don Ricardo's face, and marked the hidden meaning of his covert glance.

"You know she will be perfectly safe under my roof," continued Don Ricardo.

Falcone smiled in response to the sardonic expression of his companion.

"And perfectly at home," pursued Don Ricardo.

Again the two men exchanged smiles.

"And *you* will be quite at home, likewise, you are aware, Gabriel."

There was no need of further interchange of glance or smile; the two schemers understood each other as well as if hours had been expended in mutual explanation.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PASS OF RIO FRIO.

THE lofty summits of the Anahuac Cordilleras glittered in the full blaze of noonday sun, like shafts of gold or emerald, and a thousand streams skirting their declivities, beaded the plains as with ribbons of shining silver. On a lofty point on the main highway leading from the city of Mexico downward toward the coast and the eastern provinces, a small cavalcade had just halted, as if to rest, ascending one of the most commanding hills upon the route.

The leading persons of the party were two—leading their horses on the highest ridge of the elevated road, looked into each other's eyes, and with that mute communion revealed a world of thought. These two were a youth attired in a riding suit of black, and a young girl clad in garments of the same somber hue. They drew their horses near, side by side, and the young man, as with an involuntary impulse, clasped his companion's ungloved hand which lightly held the bridle of her palfrey, and pressed it in his own, while their mutual gaze dwelt upon the magnificent panorama beneath them.

Silence seemed indeed the fitting tribute to such a glorious scene as was mapped before their vision—silence which allows the heart to drink deeply of the spirit of beauty, until the overwrought feelings gush in tears. But a voice, low and earnest, from one of the two horsemen, who followed immediately the youth and maiden, broke thrillingly upon their ears.

"It is a land to live and die for!"

"Truly, truly, Father Herrera—a land blessed by Heaven!" replied the young girl, turning her face toward the last speaker, its lovely features illumined with deep interest.

"Ah! that men should desecrate such a land!" cried the young man beside her; "that injustice and oppression make it necessary for men to die in defense of a region so beautiful. Why can not peace abide where all is so peace-inspiring? Why must war enter here?"

"Would that it might be prevented!" said Padre Herrera, solemnly. "Would to Heaven we had yielded that unfortunate territory of Texas, which your people," addressing Pomfret "have so long coveted. And doubtless had Herrera been

firmly established in authority—had he not been threatened so long by Paredes—a negotiation would have been effected without difficulty. But the popular voice is for war—it clamors at Paredes because he does not at once take the field. What can we look for when the two republics breathe defiance, and thirst for one another's blood?"

The Yankee was about to speak, when an exclamation from the young girl, Teresa, whose gaze had been directed back toward the cry, caused the whole party suddenly to turn their heads. At first they looked anxiously for their attendants: Hamibal, Lucile and a couple of half-breed Mexicans, who with the pack-mules, were slowly toiling up the hill which they themselves, riding fast, had ascended somewhat in advance. Nothing seemed to be apprehended concerning these, but an appearance lower down fixed their attention and at once filled them with forebodings of evil. A cloud of dust upon the road indicated the approach of mounted men, who, from the speed with which they urged their horses on the unsheltered road exposed to the direct heat of the sun, were evidently in pursuit of some one in advance.

"We are discovered and followed," cried Padre Herrata. "These are government soldiers, doubtless sent to recall us. Let us to our speed at once."

"Or fight it out here—which shall it be, padre?" asked Pontret, coolly examining the priming of a horse-pistol which he drew from one of his holsters.

"We can not resist—there are too many," answered the priest. "Best try the speed of your horses, and those mules could likewise be pushed forward. But stay—there is a better plan. Below us, scarce a quarter of a mile, the road diverges, to run again at the base of yonder range of hills. Let Hamibal and the mules pursue to the left, while we press forward on the right. We shall be followed by the pursuers, if seen they be. Oh, now, my children, while I direct the good Hamibal on his course, and inform him where to halt and await us. His road is direct, ours circuitous. Fly, my children!"

Saying this, Padre Herrata dropped behind to communicate with Hamibal, while the rest of the party, spurring their horses dashed at once down the slope of the road, and plunged among the thick woods that skirted either side. Alonzo Vallejo, riding close to Teresa, kept a watchful eye upon her mettled steed, and the Yankee having satisfied himself that his pistols were in good condition, kept close behind, at the same time keeping his head half turned about to catch the first glimpse of pursuers on their headlong track.

Thus, through the varied length of shady forests and out upon the open fields, and over slope and declivity, the three riders kept their way. A gallop of ten minutes carried them far down the mountain terraces, but they still unabatedly

preserved the speed with which they had started. Suddenly the quick ear of Pomfret detected the sound of a horse's hoofs clattering behind, and presently a single steed, mounted by a female, came flying after the fugitives.

"What on airta hev ye done with yer mule? Where's the padre?" were Pomfret's rapidly uttered questions, as, whooping about in his saddle, without drawing bridle, he recognized the mulatto, Lucille, who had now arrived abreast of him.

"*Mon dieu!* I am killed—of me there is no more," exclaimed the girl, almost gasping for breath, while the excitement of the race reddened her yellow visage. "The padre—he is not here—*—un autre chemin*—he has my mule. *O cieux!* *Maman!* I am ready to die with the fatigue."

Teresa looked back inquiringly to Lucille, who, with a great effort, for the speed with which she had followed the party had almost exhausted her strength, managed to explain that Padre Herrata had exchanged his horse for the mule on which she was riding, and bidden her to press forward to join her mistress, while he, with Hannibal and the other attendants, should make at once for the Pass of Rio Frio, and there await the arrival of his friends.

"Rio Frio?" cried Teresa; "but where is that pass?"

"I know the place very well," answered Pomfret. "And if you want to drink some of the coolest water that ever flowed out of a natural ice-house, jes' wait till we get to Rio Frio. I've been there afore now, I tell ye, and in good company, too. And I tell you, Miss Teresy—if any thing ever did puzzle me, 'twas to know how in time such tarnal cold water comes out of a volcano! Jerusalem! it's like the old chap in Esop's fables, that blowed hot and cold at the same time. But let's push ahead and keep movin', miss. There ain't no time to lose."

At that portion of the great national road which the party were now descending, the mountains rose steeply on every side, and many volcanic peaks were visible at various points of the horizon. The highway was broad and well beaten, and sheltered from the sun's rays by wooded hills, rising continually, between which could be caught, at intervals, a view of some large lake filling a hollow which perhaps was once a crater's bed, and worn upon the green mountain side like a silver bucket on a giant's arm. They were now more than ten thousand feet above the level of the sea, having, since leaving the city of Mexico on the day previous, ascended about three thousand feet and traveled nearly forty miles. Twenty of these however had been ridden since daybreak that morning, consequently it became important that they should speedily reach a place of rest and security, or abandon all hope of escape.

Meantime they urged their flagging horses down the hills at a pace which was hazardous in the extreme. Vallego's right hand held a rein of Teresa's horse, while he guided his own

with the left, and the Yankee performed the same office for the girl, Lucille. Fortunately, all the company were good riders, and their animals well trained to mountain travel, so that no mishap interrupted their adventurous course. Conversation, however, was impossible, for all attention became absorbed in the contemplation of their position, and nothing was heard on that lonely road—lonely, because the midday is unusual for travel—but the sharp clatter of the horses' hoofs, echoed from the deep clefts of wood beneath.

At length Rio Frio was discovered—Rio Frio, a small mountain stream, its waters of the lowest possible temperature, and transparently clear. Piled up around it are the bases of the great mountain range whose summits guard forever the snows that fall upon them. Ledges and walls of porphyry rise steeply, one above another, to incredible heights all over this region, and form bastions, as it were, through which the road winds in a narrow channel to which the streamlet has given the name of Cold River Pass. Here a small force might probably resist successfully the passage of an army, for the locality and natural defenses make the position a sort of Thermopylae; as it is the gateway of the loftiest ridge of all the Cordillera chain below the city of Mexico, and only a few miles beneath the point of prospect over all the surrounding country.

The route of the fugitives pointed toward Puebla, and till reaching that city, they had intended journeying by easy stages. Consequently, though traveling that day since the earliest light, they had at that moment when alarmed by pursuers, accomplished less than forty miles from the capital, scarcely half the distance to the plain of Cholula, on which Puebla stands. But the fear of capture made a great difference in their rate of progress, and the last eight miles had been traversed in an exceedingly brief space of time. Rio Frio was now at hand, where doubtless the mule-party, which had traveled by a shorter cut, would be found awaiting their approach.

But when Rio Frio was reached, no mule-party—no Padre Herrera or Hamedel were to be seen. Pomfret and Vallejo looked at each other in silence, fearing to give voice to the impression which obtruded upon their minds. Terrell observed their uncertainty.

"They may have delayed—they may have rested."

"Rather doubtful," responded the Yankee. "Padre Herrera ain't the man to stop when he's got started; and the road they took was even three miles shorter than our'n. I'm kind o' sure I lost the party—*fixed*."

"Could they have been interrupted?" asked Vallejo.

"Well, to tell the real truth, I've been sort o' dubious for some time about findin' the padre at Rio Frio. You see, if the fellers had followed us, we'd had some signs o' chasin' afore now. 'Steal o' that, we hain't seen a hooter of anybody behind

us since we first got out on a run. Now my 'pinion is that they've hunted the padre instead of our party, and as the mules couldn't travel fast with their packs, they've jes' overhauled 'em and captured the hull—"

"Listen! that's surely the sound of horses' feet," cried Teresa, suddenly raising her finger to impose silence.

Her companions listened, and in a moment detected the noise of hoofs, very faint and apparently distant, but evidently advancing at a rapid pace along the lower road by which the mules should have arrived ere now.

"I hear 'em—I do so," cried Pomfret. "And they ain't no mule-hoofs either. It's jes' as I expected. The band of rascals have got the packs, and now they're in hot chase after us. Miss Teresa—Senor Valdez—I guess we'll have to knock under, this time."

"No! let us defend ourselves," exclaimed Alonzo.

"Can't be done—they're too many for us," returned the Yankee, loosening his pistols in their holsters as he spoke, and shifting the handle of a large knife which he wore in his belt, so as to bring it nearer his hand. There was a look of quiet determination on Pomfret's countenance which gave assurance to his companions, even while he declared the uselessness of defense.

"We've got to play Ingen," remarked the North American, with a twinkle of his gray eye.

"What do you mean, Senor?"

"Why, jes' take to the woods, and trust to Providence," returned Pomfret. "Don't say another word, any of ye, but follow your leader, and we'll look out for chances."

Saying this, Pomfret grasped the bridle of Lachie's horse, as he had done before, and without more ado led the way by turning on the banks of the stream, and plunged into the thick forest which skirted the mountains that here showed steeply over the narrow road. In a moment more, Rio Prio was deserted, but from the lower road could now be heard distinctly the measured and rapid sound of an approaching party of horses.

CHAPTER XII.

TERESA'S ESCAPE.

MEANWHILE, as divined by Pomfret, the mule-party had been overtaken and captured. Padre Herrera, having joined Hannibal and hastily giving him orders to await his mistress at the Rio Prio pass, was about to follow his friends immediately, when he was accosted by the mulatto, Lachie, who begged to

accompany him to her mistress, leaving to Hannibal the care of the mules.

"*Oh, padre, ¿qué pasa?*" cried Lucille, "what we shall do without one another? Each will be lost. Let me go, Padre Herrata."

"Tush, child, your place is with your mistress," answered the good priest; "but you ride a mule; it can not keep up with the horses."

"*Oh, ¿qué pasa?*" what will become of me?" cried the girl.

Padre Herrata glanced backward from the high point which the mules had now reached, and beheld the pursuing party skirting the precipice beneath, at a pace which would soon bring them up the winding road. He decided immediately what course to take.

"Dismount," said he, quickly, to the mulatto, at the same time springing from his own horse. "We will exchange animals. Gallop forward and overtake your mistress; I will mount the mule and go on with Hannibal. We shall stop at the Rio Frio pass. Away, my girl!"

Lucille needed no second command. In an instant more the exchange was effected, and the mulatto dashed down the mountain in pursuit of her mistress, while Padre Herrata, bestriding the mule, said quietly to Hannibal:

"It is doubtless for the best; now let us press forward quickly."

The negro, who cherished great respect for the padre, ranged the mules, five in number, with his two fellow-attendants bringing up the rear, and thus disposed, the party diverged suddenly from the main road, and clattered swiftly down the more direct, but rough and difficult road that led to the Paso del Rio Frio. Padre Herrata and Hannibal led the way, while the two attendants, riding on either side, and grasping the head of the heavily laden pack mule, followed as fast as they were able. Behind them, as they descended the rocky pathway, they heard the noise of horses' hoofs suddenly cease, and knew that the pursuing company had gained the eminence which they had just left, and were doubtless halting to reconnoiter—that point, as we have before noticed, affording an extended prospect over the lower plain.

Padre Herrata knew that, if pursued vigorously by the party behind, his own had little chance of escape; but he trusted to reaching the Rio Frio before being overtaken, in which event he relied on being able to elude immediate capture, and perhaps to rescue his friends entirely, by abandoning the mules to the two females and Hannibal, under the conduct of Pontret, and then to ride back upon the main road with Valijo and the Mestizos, in order to parley with the enemy and thus give time to the fugitives to escape. He knew the Yankee to be well acquainted with all the country around Puebla, and trusted in his

courage and discretion to protect his charge, while himself and Vallejo, being Spaniards, could not be in danger of much beyond capture and imprisonment, even if the pursuers should prove to be, as he feared, vindictive personal enemies.

But the priest, in this calculation, had no thought of the probability of the lower and dangerous ravine road being taken by those behind. Such, however, it became very soon evident was the case, for hardly had the mules advanced a mile when the clatter of horses was heard above, and Padre Herrata at once knew that the mules and not the horses would be first overtaken. At first, this conviction was gratifying to the priest, promising, as it did, a means of delaying their enemies, and thus affording better opportunity of escape to Teresa and her escort. But he reflected immediately that the pack-mule carried all the personal apparel and necessities of the lady, and that, moreover, as he had appointed Rio Frio as the place of rendezvous, it was quite probable that his friends might there await his coming, which must of course result in their capture. Padre Herrata was almost in despair, for he saw no method of extrication from this new danger; but nevertheless, the priest was quick to resolve and prompt to execute, and he seized a forlorn hope.

"Hannibal!" he cried, "take the bridle of the pack-mule and push forward on the straight road, at your speed, till you reach your mistress. Then say to Senor Pomfret that we are taken, and he must escape as he can. Do you understand, Hannibal?"

"Yes, massa. I'm to 'scape 'long wi' Massa Pomfret, an' you is to be cotched."

"Away, then, and do your best."

Hannibal seized the mule's bridle and urged his own forward at its utmost speed, while Padre Herrata, addressing the mestizoes, bade them turn their mules and follow him. Hannibal, the negro, looked back once and beheld a cloud of dust as his late companions disappeared in a curve of the ascent, and then pushed forward as rapidly as possible. The road was rough and uneven, and the sharp points of the porphyritic rocks caused even the mules, sure-footed as they were, to hesitate in some portions of the rugged way. But the bold, intrepid runner, his mistress, took note neither of danger nor difficulty, leaving his beast with a short lathorn thong which he carried, and using various inflections of voice and hand to regulate the animal's motions.

"Gorra! you creep, you son of a jack, you!" cried the negro. "Why for you no run like horse? Ah! I gits off, 'fore long—go alone. Come up, de massa—no time for go to sleep yeah."

By dint of such admonitions, Hannibal managed to infuse considerable energy into his long ears and stock, and they ascended and descended the rocky paths with unnumbered alacrity till the pass of Rio Frio, with its high walls of mountains on either side,

was at last reached. But to Hamish, unacquainted with the appointed place of meeting, the little stream that gushed by the road presented no inducements to pause. His mistress and her companions were nowhere to be seen, and the padre had directed him to push forward till he reached them. Consequently he stopped not at Rio Frio, save for a moment to breathe his mules, but plunged downward once more and entered in the narrow intricacies of the pass beneath.

Thus it happened that, when in a very brief space after Hamish's passing the stream the horses of his mistress and her party reached the same spot, no traces of the negro were visible. The road was too rocky to receive any indentation from the feet of mules, so Pomfret and the others remained ignorant that the too earnest servant had missed them; and therefore, only pausing to be sure they were still pursued, the fugitives, as we have seen, departed from the highway and plunged into the woody dingles on the right of the Rio Frio.

The sun was now declining, for the day had worn some two hours since the time when our travellers had contemplated so calmly the grand panorama of the valley of Mexico, outspread beneath their gaze. On the unsheltered road, the heat and glare were still, it is true, almost unbearable; but when, diverging from the pass, our party reached the velvet carpet of a succession of secluded glades, and felt themselves borne over the grassy turf, without the sound of a hoof upon its springy bed, and when, through its mountain openings, a delicious breeze came to refresh both riders and steeds, the sudden transition seemed like enchantment, and the woodlands through which they advanced might have passed for the borders of fairy regions.

But the green glades and unobstructed forest-openings soon gave place to difficult and devious paths, as the horses began to descend the mountain terrace on which they had entered from the highway, and became involved in the thick growth of underwood and clumps of cacti, interspersed with palms and dwarfed oaks. The ground began to be uneven and dangerous, where volcanic fragments protruded constantly, from beds of lava and heaps of slag. It now became impossible to keep the saddle, and Vallojo assisted Teresa to alight, while Pomfret, tethering the horses in single file, led them through tangled brakes and down the difficult slopes, always contriving to discover the most practicable pathway.

Thus, proceeding for some hours, they penetrated the wilderness so far as to be quite uncertain regarding either course or progress. The loss of Pablo Hamata and Hamish, with the mules, occasioned much uneasiness; but Teresa could not readily in the shadowiness and confusion of her countryman, Pomfret, whom Providence, it appeared, had sent to be a protector in her hour of trial. Nor was the maiden insensible to the chivalric attentions of Alonzo Vallojo, whose whole anxiety seemed to be

for her safety and comfort. The youth, indeed, was not one to remain unnoticed by a lady's eye. His form was graceful, yet sinewy, his manner courteous, and his noble features, naturally pale, were now flushed with exertion, and perhaps the happiness of serving the fair American. Many a romantic young lady might have been glad to travel with such a cavalier as Valerio; though none, perhaps, could have complained less than she did of the hardships encountered—of brambles, rough cactus, and stony soil, tearing her garments and wounding her tender feet, albeit a manly arm lifted her lightly over the most difficult obstacles. Teresa suffered, but smiled, as she kept on, glad to escape what she dreaded far worse, her unscrupulous Mexican pursuers.

At length the yellow sunbeams began to slant across the foliage, and, much to their joy, the rugged ground gave way to breaks of level sward and trees less tangled with undergrowth. It was evident that water was near, for the grass grew greener and the cactus clumps disappeared; and presently they gained an opening in the forest which ushered them abruptly on a luxuriant glade, so quiet and lovely, that their first glimpse of it made them forget the fatigues of the march.

It was an invitation to halt and repose. Pomfret, without speaking, proceeded to unbuckle the trappings, and remove the saddles from the horses, allowing the weary animals to crop the rich grass. Then turning to his companions, our Yankee addressed them in his quaint way:

"My friends, we've had considerable of an Ingen trail this afternoon, and it's my 'pinion we've got about as far as sundown, anyhow."

"And what do you propose to do now, Mr. Pomfret?" asked Teresa.

"Camp down, I reck'n, and git a good night's lodgin' before we tackle up again, miss—"

"Remain here?"

"Well, now, we might look a smart spell further, and find things a sight wos, Miss Teresy. This 'ere interval's cut out by nature as a camp-in'-down spot; and I calculate Squire Valerio and myself can fix up a wigwam for you as good as Princess Pocahontas ever had, now I tell you."

"I have every confidence in you, Mr. Pomfret," responded Teresa.

"There, now, thank you, miss; an I see if we don't make a real lady's chamber for you, bless your heart," replied Pomfret. "And last of all, before the sun goes down, I want to show you about where we are, friends. Jes' look up there." The Yankee pointed, as he said this, through a gap in the overhanging branches of trees, and the eyes of Alonzo and Teresa followed his motion. They could discover nothing, however, but a succession of shelving precipices towering above.

"Jes' look sharp," cried Pomfret. "Cast your eyes up slant-

inducular to that mountain-top, an' I see if you can't sight a white spot, lookin' like a tarnation cro'-nest. Well, now, I tell ye, that's the identical place we crossed, jes' fore them yaller-skins come on full chase arter us."

"Surely," exclaimed Vallojo, "we can not have descended from that altitude."

"Fool," replied Pomfret. "Nothin' short o' two thousand foot, if it's a hair; and what's more, we've traveled a dozen miles, cross-hots, since you and I stood on that 'ere cro'-nest. You see the great natural road winds down the mounting side about ten miles away from this, and goes a skirin' the foothills to Puebla."

"How far are we, then, from Puebla?" asked Alonzo.

"Hard on to thirty miles, high as I can guess," answered the Yankee; "but, there's a friend o' mine and Padre Herrata's nearer than that, where we can put up a spell. But I reckon a bite o' somethin' wouldn't hurt any on us about now," continued Pomfret, as he proceeded to the saddle-bags and began to take from them several articles provided by his forethought. "Here's some figs, and a box o' sardines, squire, and there's a flask o' rare sape' wine, no discount, now I tell ye. Miss Teresy, we've got some sugar tamarinds and poundcake, that'll jes' do—any quantity; and there's a brook under yonder bush, singin' away like a teakettle. But, for' sakes, Senor Vallojo, you and I mustn't forget the wigwam. Here, Lucile, you jes' fix up tea, and the square and me'll tend to other chores. Come along, Senor."

Alonzo hastened to emulate the Yankee, in making himself useful, and the twain, penetrating the thick wood, soon collected a mass of green boughs and favorite foliage, with which they returned loaded to the camp. Meantime, Lucile assisted her mistress to prepare a tempting repast, which was spread upon the sweet grass, under the soft haze of twilight. The young men on their part, aided speedily by Pomfret's jack-knife, began to build an abode for Teresa between four symmetrical trees, which offered good support, while, crossing and interweaving the branches and twigs into an impervious roof, they joined it to the ground with a growth of vines, disposing the sides, like drapery, in folds and looped tentacles. A quantity of various wild flowers, rich with perfume, peeped tastefully out from the curtains of curtains, and beneath all was the velvet verdure, soft as a downy couch. Altogether, our artists created a tower that astonished and delighted her for whom shelter it was intended.

After discussing the supper, securing the horses, and inspecting all surrounding things, Pomfret reclined with Vallojo on the turf, enjoying their cigars, while Teresa remained with Lucile to her sylvan dormitory. The night was passed in alternate watches by the gentlemen; and when the first rays of the sun began to slope over the mountains, Pomfret was up, with horses ready

for the road. Teresa came forth, rosy and beautiful, to tell of her calm repose, and Valdejo, like a true knight, hastened to arrange every thing for her tray-lar comfort. A draught of sparkling water from the running brook near, brought in a goblet which emanated, like every other necessary, from Pomfret's saddle-bags, with some tamarind conserve and crisp white crackers, tempted Teresa's appetite; while her escort contented themselves each with a cup of wine before putting foot in stirrup. Then they all rode away, in the mellow atmosphere of morning, inhaling a thousand sweets from the wooded plain, then riding in all the freshness of spring. Pomfret talked of adventures connected with the neighboring hills, which were noted in Mexican story for many wild exploits of brigands and other outlaws; and as for Alonzo Valdejo, riding through cool glades, over meadows of green turf, from which the eye could catch glimpses of a broad river flowing between fields and hills, he, we may be sure, as he looked on Teresa, sighed to think such romantic journeying must ever be ended.

At length, emerging from mountain declivities, the party entered on a beaten track, which Pomfret conjectured must conduct to the national highway from Mexico to Puebla de los Angeles. The path, however, was still narrow and sequestered, though signs of husbandry multiplied as they advanced. On the route, the previous afternoon, no vegetation, save that of nature's rank distribution, had met their observation, but now they were greeted with all varieties of cultivated products flourishing in this luxuriant portion of Mexico. Pomfret recognized on all sides the grains of northern climes; tender lines of wheat just starting from the generous soil, and banded with more rugged leaves of corn and barley; while here and there, as in his own New England home, were clumps of blossoming apple-trees, whose familiar perfumes were wafted to him by memories of childhood. Teresa, as she glanced at the Yankee, who was quite silent, fancied that she saw a tear in his eyes, and a pensive shadow softening his sharp features; but the next moment, Putnam Pomfret uttered a loud "Ahoy!" and began to whistle vigorously the air of "Hail Columbia."

The tower the white walls of a habitation, crowned by vases that crowned an eminence on their hill, attracted the gaze of Teresa and Alonzo. It was evidently the abode of rich men, perhaps luxury, for the travelers, peering forward through the intervals of the well-trimmed trees, caught glimpses of sumptuous gleaming and the green, fine wood nymphs, while the cooling drop of fountain trickled on the aromatic air that seemed to blow from gardens.

"A beautiful dwelling place," cried Valdejo, in admiration, as the house came more fully into view, with its balconies commanding a terrace immediately over them, its jalousied cas-

ments overruu with honeysuckles and clematis and rose, almost hiding the porch and open door.

"Lovely, indeed," responded Teresa, sighing, as she thought how she had often pictured such a home to be shared with her brother, when fortune should have smiled upon him. And that brother—alas!

"Well, squire," cried Putnam Pomfret, abruptly pulling the bridle, "we might as well put up and bait. I'm nation sure there's something to eat here; and folks as good as they're handsome, now I tell ye."

Saying this, Pomfret turned from the road, through a grassy lane, which, winding at the base of the terrace, conducted upward to the mansion. On either side was a ledge of woodland, whose delicious aroma made the air leamy. Extending beyond, were orchards thick with blossoms, and fields of new-springing grain. Around the cottage were a piazza and balcony, and every casement was covered with roses and flowers. Approaching the rosy portal, Pomfret dismounted and gave his hand to Teresa, while at the same moment two figures appeared, apparently the master and mistress of the hacienda.

"Don Lorenzo, I s'pose you don't forgit an old friend," was the salutation of Pomfret to the young and smiling gentleman, who advanced first.

"Senor Pomfret! welcome! a thousand welcomes!" was the hearty response, with extended hand. "How happy is this meeting! And your friends, Senor?"

"We shall be acquainted, Don, double quick, now I tell you," cried Pomfret, proceeding to introduce his companions to the host, who, in turn, presented them to his wife, a charming creature, in the flesh of mirthful beauty, who embraced Teresa warmly, kissing her lips with true womanly frankness.

"Don Lorenzo, if you and your wife, Senora Inez, ain't as sweet as two roses on a stem, then there's no sick thing as humanity in me," cried Pomfret. "It warms up my heart to see you smiling so, I'm c'enamost like to cry—God bless both on ye!"

So saying, Putnam Pomfret took Vallojo's arm, and followed his hostess into the cottage, whither Teresa had already been conducted by its gentle mistress.

CHAPTER LII.

THE WOUNDED PADRE.

PADRE HERRATA, after enjoining Hannibal to make all haste in overtaking his mistress, rode back the reader knows, in company with the Mestizos to meet his prisoner. Arrived within speaking distance, he drew rein at the abrupt command of their leader, and remained motionless, with serene countenance and placid demeanor. The Mestizo lackies, checking their mules, remained behind.

Gabriel Falcone, foaming with rage, rode up to the priest, and leveled a pistol at his head.

"Traitorous friar! where are the orders of your party?"

"All of my party you can see before you, *Señor*."

"'Tis a lie! Where is that foreign priest and his female accomplice, for whose arrest I bear the orders of General Paroles? Answer without evasion, priest, or I'll blow out your plotting brains on the spot."

"Have you warrant for that, *Señor*?" asked Padre Herrata, preserving his equanimity.

"By the fiend! you will be damned if you refuse to answer my questions. Where are the Americans?"

"They have journeyed another road than this," answered the priest.

"Another road—be damned!"

"I speak truth, *Señor*. Those whom you seek have taken the upper road, leaving myself and the twins behind me to be honored by your personal pursuit."

These words were said very quietly, inclined Falcone's anger to the last degree. "Villainous monk!" he shouted, rising fiercely in his saddle, and, pressing the trigger of the pistol with which he had not ceased to threaten the priest, he discharged it full at the latter's breast.

Padre Herrata raised his hand to his head, closed his eyes a moment toward heaven, and then fell heavily from his horse upon the dust of the road.

As the pistol exploded, the Mexican soldiers who formed Falcone's troops uttered a cry of dismay, and hurriedly left the man fallen before two or three of the rough fellows sprang from their saddles and knelt beside the prostrate body. Gabriel Fal-

"Where are your masters, dogs? Speak, or you swing from the boughs above you."

The Mestizoes averted their eyes only to fix them on the neighboring trees, which offered such convenient substitutes for the gallows. Then, with one accord, both slid to the ground, before the wrathful Mexican.

O, por amor de Dios! "Senor, we are innocent. We are poor devils of servants not worth a rope."

"Answer me, then—where are your master and mistress?"

"*Los Americanos?*" cried the nearest.

"El Senor Pomfret?" gasped the other wretch.

"Yes—what of *him*? And the Senora? Speak, you dogs, or I'll hang you at once."

"*O, i'rrivir no!*" The padre spoke truth. *Los Americanos* have taken the upper road. 'Tis a league back, *Excelencia*, they turned off."

"Perdition!" roared Falcone, spurring his horse, and riding down the miserable Mestizoes. Then, wheeling round, he floated the soldiers, several of whom had lifted Padre Herrata in their arms, and were stricken the wound in his breast.

"Is the traitor dead?" demanded the young man, with an oath. But, instead of a reply from the soldier, he heard a general murmur, which boded insubordination among the rest.

"Do you hear me, sirrah? Is this man dead?"

"The holy priest still breathes," answered the soldier. "It is not quite a murder."

Captain Falcone—for he now held that rank by commission from the new President—bit his lips, and gave the order to remount.

"What shall we do with the wounded padre?" asked another soldier.

"To the devil with—ha! will ye mount or are ye, too, traitors and rebels?"

"We are neither, captain," responded the man. "But all the world knows Padre Herrata is a friend to Mexico, and to her soldiers. He has shared bread with the soldiers, and a curse would rest on us if we leave him to die in the highway."

Those words were spoken with a dogged earnestness which convinced Falcone that it would be unsafe to ignore his revolutionary views. Intimidation of such men, accustomed to *desobediencia*, was out of the question; so, stifling his rage, he yielded to necessity, and gave permission to the soldiers, assisted by the Mestizoes, to construct a litter, whence to transport the wounded and insensible priest.

And thus, instead of capturing the fair Teresa, and revenging himself on her protectors, Captain Gabriel Falcone now found himself constrained to retrace his steps to the capital. Cursing his evil temper, which had led him to commit the rash act of shooting a priest, and one, moreover, as he soon learned from the

conversation of his gloomy soldiers, who was known and beloved among the people, the new officer took the descending way to the gates of Mexico, where he arrived at the edge of evening. The two Mestizos were speedily conveyed to the guard-house, and Padre Herrata, reported as a wounded prisoner, to the hospital; after which Falcone divested himself of his road-stained military trappings, and set out to seek his friend Don Ricardo Ramos, just at the hour when Putnam Pomfret and Alonzo Vallejo were busy in the construction of that romantic bower in which, as we have already seen, the beautiful Teresa passed her quiet willwood night.

CHAPTER XIV.

FALCONE'S FORAY.

AN atmosphere of happiness reigned in and around the hacienda of Lorenzo and Inez, the gentle entertainers of Pomfret and his two companions. Lorenzo, possessed of ample means, and warmly seconded in his tastes by the devotion of his lovely wife, had surrounded their beautiful home with all that could contribute to the gratification of true artistic taste or enhance the pure pleasures of domestic life. The mansion itself, embowered in fragrant woodland, and redolent with the perfume and grace of the flowers which encompassed its every border, was a fit dwelling-place for hearts inspired with mutual love, and charming as the seat of freely-dispensed charity and enlarged hospitality. The master and mistress of that hacienda, though mingling little in the world beyond their threshold, were yet known and esteemed by high and low through all the cultivated neighborhood, which stretched from the main road nearest to their gates, downward through the luxuriant "Valley of Marillo," named after the father of Lorenzo's bride, a rich proprietor, and around the base of the lofty "Outlaw's Mount," once the retreat of brigands, lately dispersed by the death of their famous leader.

Weeks fled swiftly over the heads of the three guests, and yet no tidings of the Padre Herrata, or of the missing Hannibal and the Mestizo could be gathered, though messengers had been dispatched at various times from the hacienda to the neighboring villages, and even as far off as Puebla, some miles across the plain, from the other extremity of the valley of Marillo. Pomfret grew impatient, apprehending that danger had befallen his friend the padre, and well knowing that the priest's enemies, as well as his own, were not few among the supporters of the new government. Once or twice, when no news came, he thought of

leaving the hacienda, which would afford a secure retreat for his young countrywoman, and retracing his course to the capital; but a little reflection satisfied the Yankee of the futility of any aid of his, should the priest be really in the hands of powerful foes, while his own discovery might involve both himself and friends in greater peril. He resolved, therefore, to accept for a period longer the hospitality of his Mexican friends in order to see what turn the political affairs of Mexico might take, before exposing himself to all the risks which, in the present excited state of popular feeling, an alien might encounter, even though provided with a passport of the late President Herrera.

Meanwhile, Don Ricardo Ramos and his friend Falcone, in spite of the young captain's unremitted efforts to discover the whereabouts of his enemy, Pomfret, and the maiden in whom he was no less interested, remained in entire ignorance of the fate of either. That they were concealed not many leagues from the capital appeared strongly probable, though the country had been scoured by spies as well as traversed by the two conspirators in every direction.

Thus passed the months, till the return of Santa Anna, the fall of Paredes and the capitulation of Monterey, followed one another in agitating the public mind. But, hardly had the latter event been chronicled by report, than intelligence more nearly affecting his desires, was communicated to Falcone. Don Ricardo roused him one morning with the information that he had at length obtained certain traces of the fugitive Teresa.

"My dear Gabriel, we have the lovely American maiden at **last in our clasp.**"

"Explain yourself, Don Ricardo. Tell me where she is."

"Ah you come to your senses. Well, our fair one is at a romantic hacienda, some miles this side of Puebla, where, snugly concealed, she manages to baffle all our search."

"**And how did you find this out?**"

"By the merest accident. A silver-trailer from Chihuahua, who has dealings with Senor Pomfret, and who is a talkative fellow, made acquaintance with me last night at the gaming-table. From him I learned that the Yankee had visited Puebla, in company with the proprietor of a hacienda of the neighboring valley. This was hint enough to me, and following up the trail, I have the satisfaction to inform you that Teresa is at our good pleasure, for a sudden visit, though quite secure as she stands, **from all molestation.**"

"And this Yankee and the youth Valdejo?"

"Are with her, it seems. But you do not fear them surely?"

"*Fear!*" retorted Falcone. "Not I, Don Ricardo. But this good news is overpowering. What shall we do?"

"A half-dozen stout fellows at our backs will remove whatever objections the Senora might interpose to our company—**oh, Gabriel? Here you shall wed, and I will take care of her**

dowry. All we shall want is a priest when the Senora arrives."

"Priests are not hard to find in Mexico."

"Can we not secure our friend, the padre, whom you so nearly murdered with that unlucky shot? He is in prison still, I believe."

"He is, and recovered from his wound. These friars are tough. But this Padre Herrata is an impenetrable fellow."

"Fish! With friars one can do anything. He has influence with your Senora, and can smooth the matter for you as no other priest could."

"That is true. I leave all in your hands."

It was at the earliest dawn of day, not long after this conversation, that the two schemers, Don Ricardo and Paley, in company with six other horsemen, rode leisurely along the national road to a declivity which conducted to the entrance of Morillo's valley, near which was situated the hacienda of Lerma and Inca—that happy retreat in which Teresa had found her refuge.

The six men, who, at a word from their leader, threw themselves from the saddle, and proceeded, without ceremony, to tether their steeds in such manner as to permit the animals to crop the herbage, while at the same time they should be securely confined within the thicket, were such characters as one seldom meets in quiet times or peaceful lands, but who in Mexico are too common at all seasons. Swarthy from the sun in which they bask, and with reckless passions imprinted on their countenances, these fellows could be easily recognized as members of that lepro class which curses Spanish America as the *hazaña* does Italy. Cunning and devoid of conscience, often desperate, these miserable people present a true type of the *hazudo*, with its latter impulses forgotten, and its earlier impulses brutalized. Theophile of genuine race, once a partizan, these wretches are superstitiously servile to priests, and the ready instruments of political oppression. Such is the real but ill-fated Indian lepro of Mexico.

The Senora Teresa, in the solution of her new home, surrounded by the society of her kind business and the gentle occupation of Alberto Valdepo, revived in a great measure from the depression into which her bereavement had thrown her. The consolation of a new home, and as time grew day by day, the society of Alberto's friends, and the kind and hospitable treatment to which she was subjected, as the possession of her father's estate became secured. Naturally, then, the individual who had hitherto been so much to be feared, to the great joy of the young hearts, are ever disposed to weave out of the beautiful fables of their fairy tale, which they can not believe will ever distill to tears.

Hopes and dreams, blending sorrow with happiness, occupied Teresa's mind one lovely morning, when, leaving her

friend Inez engaged in household duties, she ventured out of the garden walls attached to the hacienda, and wandered into the wood and beyond, a favorite resort of the dreamy Alonzo, who, stretched beneath some branching tree, was probably indulging at this hour in reveries connected with her future and his own. She passed from the cultivated grounds, after picking a bunch of fresh blossoms, and had wandered for some time amid the solemn stillness of the woody mountain-side, when her steps were suddenly arrested by a rash in the neighboring thicket, and, ere her lips could utter a word of alarm, she found herself enveloped in a cloak, and borne swiftly through the forest intricacies. Vainly she struggled and sought to articulate a cry. It was the arm of Gabriel Falcone which gathered her muffled form to his breast, while his ruffian hand pressed the mantle over her mouth. Don Ricardo preceded the younger villain, parting the interlacing undergrowth to afford a passage, and, at intervals, assisting, without uttering a word, in managing Falcone's restless burden. Thus the abductors hurried to a sheltered thicket, where the leperos awaited them in readiness to mount and gallop away.

But the prize was not yet secured. For as the two men reached the forest-edge, and gave a signal to their myriads to emerge from the covert, Teresa spasmodically forced the covering from her lips, and uttering a shriek, half smothered but still piercing in its despair, sunk, with the exertion, insensible in her kidnapper's arms. Don Ricardo vented an oath, as he rose toward the thicket, whither Falcone followed with the motionless weight he sustained. But at this moment the latter saw his path disputed by the sudden apparition of a man, whose hand grasped a lifted club. It was Alonzo Vallejo, who, doubting whether he heard Teresa's voice, had reached the spot to learn her situation. At once seizing the only weapon in his power, a fragment of wood, he precipitated himself upon the abductor, whom he recognized as his father and go to Falcone.

Had the gamester been a giant, he could hardly have withstood an onset like that of Vallejo, inspired for the moment with Herculean vigor. But Falcone, starting back, interposed the body of Teresa beneath the impending blow, which became checked once, as if paralyzed. Don Ricardo, at the same instant, discovering his errand's danger, turned with sword in hand, and at the same time the leperos emerged from their concealment. But the unarm'd Vallejo reckoned not of this in defense of his Teresa. Springing as he to assault Ricardo, he dealt the foremost lepero so steadily a blow with his club, that he now lay prone to the earth. Then, relinquishing the unwieldy weapon, he rushed upon the fallen bravo, and with a single movement possessed himself of the sword from his hand and a pistol from his belt. Thus, standing suddenly armed before his surprised associates, the brave youth fired at Don Ricardo, who fell back

just in time to escape the bullet, which, grazing his cheek, buried itself in the head of a lepero behind him.

Such an unlooked for reverse as the fall of two of their comrades in as many minutes, struck the remaining leperos with panic; and forgetting that only one man opposed them, they turned to fly. But Don Ricardo's voice recalled them: "Cowards!" he cried, "do you run from a stripling like this?" And, with a fierce malediction, he rushed upon Vallejo, who prepared to defend himself.

But it seemed now that the gallant young man was destined to end his devotion with the sacrifice of his life; for, though Falcone took no part in the conflict, there were yet five armed men opposed to one. Nevertheless, he withstood Don Ricardo's assault without faltering, only taking the precaution to place his back against a tree.

"Leave the youth to me, Gabriel. Out with the horses and mount," cried Don Ricardo. "I will settle this little affair."

Obediently to this command, the leperos led the horses forward, while Ramos continued to press Vallejo, who, unequal in strength, felt himself momentarily sinking. Meantime, two of the leperos had lifted their prostrate comrades, one of whom was dead, while one of the remaining myrmidons mounted with Teresa on one of the horses.

"Have none of you a pistol shot to avenge your fellows?" cried Falcone, as he sprung to his saddle, and grasped the bridle of the horse on which the maiden was secured. In answer to this appeal, a lepero leveled his pistol and fired at Alonzo, who, at the same moment, received Don Ricardo's blade in his sword-arm. But at this crisis, a new arrival changed the aspect of affairs. A rush was heard suddenly in the forest, and the tall figure of Putnam Pomfret darted into the road, with the celerity of a panther.

"Jes' in time, yaller skins!" shouted the North American, as his quick eye divined with a glance the position of all parties. Then dashing at Falcone, who sat on horseback next to the steed whereon two leperos were holding Teresa, he grasped the gamester's shoulders and tore him with a violent effort to the ground. "Lie thar', ye pison serpent!" he cried, at the same time clubbing in his powerful hand a heavy musket, with which he dealt a sweeping blow upon the leperos.

"Help, Ricardo!" yelled Falcone, rolling in the dust ere he could recover himself. The elder ruffian turned from Vallejo, who had fallen at the foot of the tree; but ere he could interpose his assistance, the sound of approaching feet was heard, and Lorenzo, followed by several servants of the hacienda, appeared advancing. The leperos rushed to their horses, leaving Pomfret at liberty to turn his attention to Teresa, while the two principal villains, discovering all to be lost, quickly imitated the flight of their satellites.

CHAPTER XV.

PADRE HERRATA'S FRIEND.

"TEN thousand curses on my ill luck!" cried Gabriel Falcone, as he sat with his associate, Don Ricardo, in the latter's house, about a week after their unsuccessful attempt to abduct Teresa Ginton.

"Ten thousand curses will not help the matter," responded the elder conspirator, in his cynical manner.

"What in the fiend's name is to be done, man?"

"Have patience, my good Gabriel. Meantime, go you to the Padre Herrata, and promise him whatever you please, on condition that he assists you to marry the Senora. I doubt not that, with a little priestly aid, you can soon lure the fair one to trust herself in other hands than those of her Cid, Vallejo."

"I fear this padre. He has little cause to bear good-will to me."

"Padres and women have their prices at all times. This friar's assistance is necessary. Let it be paid for, and we shall secure it."

"I will make the attempt, Don Ricardo, and report to you the result."

So saying, Falcone went home to his quarters in the castle of Chapultepec, whose strong towers defended the approaches to the capital. Here were the military schools and head-quarters of the National Guards, and here resorted many of the best officers of the army reserve. Through favor of Paredes, Falcone was in command of a company of veterans worthy of a better captain, and to his charge had been committed a bastion, wherein were confined several state prisoners—among others the Padre Herrata.

Falcone found the priest at his devotions, kneeling upon a small window, through which could be seen a fine panorama of the valley of Mexico. Down the slope of Chapultepec to the city walls, and to the more remote lake of Tezcuco, a line of domains extended, interspersed with gardens and groves once the glory of this vale, which was also, in ancient times, the seat of those magnificent halls wherein the Montezumas collected their almost fabulous treasures of nature and art.

"Land of beauty and plenty," murmured the priest, as, unconscious of being overheard, he continued his prayer, "may the sins of thy unnatural children be visited not on thee! May war and violence be stayed, and—"

"A very good prayer, padre, but slightly out of season. War is here and violence not far off, I imagine."

The priest slowly rose, turning his calm eyes upon the intruder, whose voice he recognized. Padre Herrata's face was pale, and his form much thinner than before his imprisonment; for, though recovered from the wound inflicted by Falcone, he yet suffered from loss of blood and reduced strength.

"Prayer is never out of season, young man, and violence ever is," rejoined the priest, quietly.

"Reverend father, forget the past, and aid me with your good offices in disposing that dear girl whom I so fervently love to regard me with the affection I feel for her. Thus you will be the instrument of uniting two hearts, and of making me supremely happy."

The padre did not immediately reply. He seemed to be absorbed in thought, and his gaze wandered abstractedly through the barred window. At length, however, he spoke:

"I think, my son," he said, in a measured tone, "you remarked that by assisting you, I shall benefit myself. How may that be?"

"Alas!" said Falcone, to himself, "the pious fox must know his reward beforehand." Then he continued: "All that I can promise shall be yours. I will at once take measures for your release from this place, and if my purse and influence can advance you in-"

"Enough!" cried the priest, suddenly elevating his voice, and fixing his glance sternly upon the young man. "Gabriel Falcone! desperate gamester! unprincipled adventurer! do I not know that through you the unhappy brother of this maiden was lured to his destruction? Do I not know that the pure child loathes you as the serpent whose trail has poisoned her happy youth? Enough, Gabriel Falcone! Get thee from me!"

As Padre Herrata uttered these words, he turned away, raising his left hand with a gesture of repugnance, and expressing in his features all the horror which the retrospection of Falcone's acts was calculated to inspire. The bold young man quailed for a moment before the insignificant action, but he recovered himself immediately, and with features distorted with rage, advanced upon the priest.

"Cursed monk!" he hissed, savagely, "it is you then, who have influenced her. But I will have a reckoning from you. The next time my shot will not miss!"

Saying this, Gabriel Falcone shook his clenched hand at the calm face of the padre, and, with a forceful turn, turned toward the door of the cell, which he opened with a wrench. But an object here met his eyes which somewhat embarrassed him.

Standing majestically in the opening, apparently about entering, was a tall figure, clad in the uniform of a field officer. The

stranger stooped his lofty head beneath the stone arch, and passing Falcone without a word, advanced quickly toward the priest, whose figure was distinctly visible in the light of the window.

"Padre Herrata!"

"Answer me, my noble son! Art thou returned in deed?"

"Truly, my father. 'Tis but a brief space since arriving here I learned of your incarceration. But that is ended."

He embraced the priest affectionately in saying this.

"I shall be glad to know what all this means?" here interrupted Captain Falcone, who, regaining his assurance, confronted the stranger. "As I have the honor to command in this quarter of the hill, I demand, sir, by what right—"

"Ah, sir, you shall know my right to be here," returned Colonel Montagnone, with chilling politeness. "You will, perhaps, respect the signature of your commander. Here, then, is authority for my presence, and for the release of my friend, Padre Herrata."

The speaker drew a paper from his bosom, and extended it to the other, who cast his eyes over it. It was an order, signed by General Bravo, directing the instant release of the priest, and commanding Captain Falcone to report himself instantly at headquarters. The young officer turned pale, and regarding Montagnone with a savage look, turned on his heel and left the cell without a word, but not to report himself to his commander. Fearing of consequences he knew not what, and feeling humiliated as well as thwarted by the new adversary he had found, the general mounted his horse, and galloped at once from the hill of Chapultepec.

And Gabriel Falcone, much to his chagrin, during the same morning, found himself abruptly ordered to report himself for active service at once, with a marching division of the army. So Gabriel Falcone was once more thwarted.

CHAPTER XVI.

DON RICARDO'S PLOT.

BUT, though the younger conspirator found himself obliged to abandon for a space his darling object, that arch-schemer, Don Ricardo Ramos, desisted not in his plans for the ensnarement of Teresa Ganton, till at length he succeeded, through his emissaries, in discovering the whereabouts of Colonel Montagnone, and by this means, speedily regained trace of those under the latter's protection. He ascertained, moreover, that it was the consideration of Montagnone's influence with the

Commander-in-Chief, Santa Anna, which had occasioned Valiejo and Teresa, together with their friendly entertainers in Marillo's valley, to remove from the latter's hacienda, then imminently threatened by the American invaders. During the rapid series of events that had marked the operations of General Santa Anna, from the breaking up of the camp at San Luis, all travel through Mexico had been extremely perilous, and an attempt on the part of foreigners like Teresa Ginton and Putnam Pomfret to pass through a country swarming with predatory bands, could have resulted only in mischances. Consequently, the strangers had sojourned in Marillo's valley, till the capture of Vera Cruz, by the forces of General Scott, threatened a speedy assault of the inland, when the timely protection of Colonel Montagnone secured for his friends a safer retreat near the strongly fortified approaches to the capital itself. Senor Lorenzo and his wife availed themselves of the hospitality of a wealthy friend, Donna Isabella Nunez, who possessed a mansion near the lake Tezcuco, and Teresa Ginton accompanied them, under Montagnone's protection, to this new and securer abiding place. Meantime, Alonzo Valiejo and Putnam Pomfret consorted themselves, with Lorenzo, the guardian knights of these distressed ladies.

Lucille, the creole attendant of Teresa Ginton, was, like most of her volatile race and vocation, at once a warm-hearted and attached servant, and an incorrigible coquette. While Henriod was her fellow-domestic, she had well-nigh broken that poor fellow's heart with her vagaries, though it must be confessed her own had not been unmoved by the poor fellow's unlucky disappearance; nevertheless, as the little creole had been in past days, so she remained, until not a few full-blooded Mexicans, as well as many hapless Mestizos, felt their pulses beat faster as Lucille's white teeth glistened, or her silvery laugh tinkled in their ears. Indeed, the handmaid's besetting vice was coquettish vanity, encouraged, perhaps, by the indulgence of her gentle mistress, and the general favor in which she found herself among their hospitable entertainers. Such was Lucille—as the astute Don Ricardo Ramos had judged her to be—and therefore she was no proof against his cunning when he adroitly approached her, one morning, in the disguise of a priest, pretending to be an acquaintance of Padre Herrata, the friend of her mistress.

Lucille was, of course, glad to speak with a friend of Padre Herrata, who had gone with the army, so she said, and which Don Ricardo well knew. She was also glad to tell how beloved her mistress was, and how Senor Valiejo was a noble and handsome young gentleman, and how Senor Putnam Pomfret, the Yankee, was a grand hero, who would protect them all from the American army and everybody else. On his part, the shrewd Don Ricardo talked not only of Padre Herrata's

many virtues, but of Lucille's good looks and amiable manners; so that the foolish damsel was speedily carried away by his discourse. Besides, he talked her own native French, and listened to her glib tongue, replying to his questions, with an attention quite flattering to the silly one.

Another interview followed the first, during which the subtle Rames pretended to disclose, as a great secret, that he was an old friend of the Senora Teresa's deceased mother, and well acquainted with the orphan's family history; that, moreover, the young lady was entitled to considerable property once owned by her mother in Mexico; and that, finally, he much desired to see the orphan American in possession of all her rights. The story was so artfully woven as to deceive the credulous mulatto completely. Deluded by the pretended priest's familiarity, and carried away by her anxiety to insure some great advantage to her mistress, she readily promised to do what Don Ricardo desired, and procure an interview for him with the Senora Teresa.

The longed-for opportunity occurred soon. Senor Lorenzo, one day, accompanied his lady, and Donna Isabella, their hostess, on a drive to the city; Putnam Pomfret was absent, at the same time, on matters connected with the hacienda, and Teresa remained at home, attended by Lucille—though the devoted Alonzo was, as usual, in the vicinity of the hacienda. The maiden was occupied in her chamber, and the youth wandered near the lake borders, according to his habit, poring over some favorite author, among the rustling shadows of the grove. The long day was nearly over, and the sun disappearing behind the lofty mountains, when Lucille stole out to meet Don Ricardo, who had made himself aware, with great satisfaction, of the unprotected situation of the hacienda. The waiting-maid conducted her crafty deceiver to the cool drawing-room, with its jalousied casements overlooking the garden sweets, and half-closed with prizes of jessamine and honeysuckle. There, leaving him, she proceeded to her mistress, with the information, that a strange clergyman desired to see her.

"To see *me*, Lucille?" exclaimed Teresa. "Where is Senor Vallejo?"

"He is walking, with his book, by the lake side," answered the mulatto, demurely, her heart palpitating uneasily with the consciousness of acting a part.

"But, I can not see a stranger, Lucille."

"Oh, *maim'selle*, he asks so earnestly! And, *O ciel!* I did not remember! He did know *maim'selle's* dear mother, long ago."

As the word "*mother*" fell upon the orphan's ear, a deep flush, followed by sudden paleness, attested its effect upon her.

"Come, Lucille, we will go down at once. No, child; do you go at once and bring the Senor Vallejo. I will speak to

the holy father, presently. Say this to him, and then seek Vallejo."

Lucille hurried to inform Don Ricardo that her mistress would presently see him; but she did not hasten, as Teresa had directed, to call the Señor Vallejo. Unhappy Lucille! She did not suspect that the wicked Don Ricardo was trifling over her simplicity; that his satellites were already concealed in the woods skirting the roadside. Had the poor mulatto harbored a thought of danger, she would speedily have summoned a defender for her mistress.

But what sound was that which startled her suddenly? A suppressed shriek and the noise of rushing feet. Lucille stopped, listened intently, then darted toward the road which wound near the hacienda. Alas! the sight that met her eyes. Don Ricardo had cast away his priestly disguise, and was bearing Teresa in his arms, across the garden-walk, to a close carriage which stood at the very gate, its door attended by two swarthy servants. The woman's head and face were wound about with a thick shawl, and she appeared to be quite insensible, when lifted and thrust into the vehicle. Lucille witnessed all this, and a loud, shrill scream from her pallid lips apprised the kidnapper that she did so.

"Curse that wench! She will ruin us," cried Don Ricardo, leaping into the carriage with the muffled Teresa. "Pedro, secure the mulatto; she must go with us."

In another moment Lucille's shrieks were stifled by a process similar to that which had rendered her mistress helpless. One ruffianly servant grasped her in his arms, while the other fastened a shawl around her mouth. She was then lifted into the coach, beside the fellow called Pedro, and opposite to his master and Teresa. The other servant sprung to the box, and the vehicle rolled rapidly away, into the dusky woods through which the highway conducted.

But, swift as the wheels whirled, and the carriage was borne forward, there was a swifter pursuit suddenly commenced by a man who, from the brow of a hill at nearly a quarter of a mile distance, had caught a hurried glimpse of the procession, and heard the shriek of Lucille, as she was seized by Pedro. Putnam Pomfret, returning from his errand abroad, had reached a point of view commanding the cottage-door, just in time to overlook the last incident of the abduction—that of lifting and securing the mulatto. Pomfret's first impulse was to shout for help and plunge downward through an angry and gloomy upon the sharpers; but a moment's reflection dissuaded him that he would not reach the scene in time for service, even if there were no armed odds against him. Changing, therefore, his resolution at once, the brave Yankee dashed from the roadside, and entering the forest, bounded like a deer through its shades—following the noise of the carriage-wheels, and directing

his course to a point at which he should be able to intercept the fugitive by pursuing a shorter line than the circuitous highway. With panting chest, and ear strained to catch the sound of wheels, Pomfret thus kept on, for near a mile, when he at last found himself neck and neck with the horses which the driver was urging to their utmost speed.

"Lay on your string, Ingen," muttered Putnam Pomfret, said merrily, as his long legs traversed the ground with unabated speed. "I'm on your track now, you consarned kidnappers, and by thander, I'm a-goin' to keep it, now I tell ye."

With these words, the Yankee stretched his limbs for another leap, and, probably by the increasing gloom of the road, soon contrived, not only to reach the flying carriage, but to ensconce himself, much at his ease, upon the heavy footboard behind. Thus perched, with his legs drawn up to his chin, Putnam Pomfret felt the coach quiver as it was impelled along, and laughed quietly to himself as the dusk grew into a dense fog, and the driver cracked his whip in the darkness.

"Put her through, Ingen," muttered Pomfret. "Give 'em the string. I'll bet ye a fourpence I get to town as soon as you do."

CHAPTER XVII.

TERESA IN DANGER.

WHEN Teresa Clinton regained consciousness, she found herself lying upon a couch in a strange apartment—Lucille, kneeling beside her, was chafing her hands and bathing her forehead with restoratives. Teresa sat upright and looked wildly around her.

"Lucille! Where are we?"

The maiden placed her finger on her lips and glanced at the door.

Teresa raised her hand to her bosom.

"Where is it?—the dagger?" she asked.

"It is here, mademoiselle," answered Lucille, pointing significantly to the pearl hilt of a small stiletto hidden within the folds of a kerchief that crossed her breast. "I will give it to you, my love, when we are alone."

Hardly had the maiden pronounced these words, when a knock was heard at the door, and it was slowly unclosed, admitting the head of a man.

"May I enter?" said the softly modulated voice, and Teresa felt her heart suddenly stilled and her blood cease to flow; for upon the threshold of the apartment stood—Gabriel Falcone. The young man's face was pale, and his right arm rested in a

slung. She felt herself in that man's power, without a hope of escape, and read the triumphant expression of his glance as it met her own. She knew that the unprincipled gamester remembered her scorn, and that he was likewise determined to avenge himself. Nevertheless, as one white hand rested on the hilt of the weapon which lay hid beneath her bodice, Teresa felt that at least in one thing she was more than a match for her enemy—she feared not death.

"Senora Teresa, I come to ask pardon for all my offenses," said Falcone, with an inclination of his head. "Am I to be forgiven?"

"Forgiveness is for the repentant to expect," she replied.

"And I am truly repentant."

For an instant, as Falcone uttered these words with depressed head, a gleam of hope visited Teresa's heart; but it faded as she caught the raised eyes of the speaker fixed upon her once more, with an unmistakable expression of exultant villainy. She shuddered as those bold orbs fell upon her, and the blood rushed tumultuously to her neck and forehead.

"Do you hate me?"

"Falcone—why do you persecute me?"

"Is love, then, persecution?"

"Such love as yours is worse than hatred or persecution," exclaimed Teresa, "for it would degrade its object forever."

"Indeed!" cried Falcone, with a short laugh. "But you must take me, perhaps. I will not degrade—I would marry you!"

"And is not marriage with one whom I must despise a degradation?" cried the undaunted girl. "Falcone! it is useless for me to attempt concealment of my feelings, for you well know that now, more than ever, I must view you with contempt."

"Senora—beware!" cried the young man, his countenance growing dark with passion. "Pause ere you decide your course; for by all the fiends, you shall be mine!"

With this threat, spoken in a measured tone that evinced the resolute wickedness of his heart, Gabriel Falcone turned away, and without another look at Teresa or Lucie, strode from the apartment.

The poor mulatto girl, who had felt an unaccountable terror of the gamester Falcone, now wrung her hands and passionately deplored their situation, entreating again and again pardon for the part which she had taken in the betrayal of her mistress. But Teresa, retiring to her chamber, sunk upon her knees and poured forth fervent prayers to Heaven for succor in her extremity.

"Oh, what is to be done? Wretch—bad creature that I am—*moi!* It is I who am to blame!" moaned poor Lucie, walking up and down the room as she gave vent to her thoughts, the tears, meanwhile, streaming from her eyes.

The girl paused opposite the window and gazed eagerly through the wires that barred it. Some object without apparently attracted her attention and checked the exuberance of her affliction. And, indeed, Lucille had cause both for wonder and attention; for, as she peered between the bars of thick wire, she beheld a sight that was well fitted to astonish her. The window overlooked a square court-yard, shut in by stone walls. The apartments in which Teresa was confined were situated in the third story of the building, and high above its casements rose the dull sides of the parallelogram described by the inner walls of the ancient building. As Lucille looked upward she could just distinguish the figure of a man cautiously appearing upon the very edge of the lofty opposite wall, and beckoning to her with his hand. Lucille could not see the face of this man, but a sudden feeling of joy thrilled her heart, as though he were in some manner to be connected with the deliverance of herself and mistress. She stopped not to reason with her hopes, but pressing forward against the wires, returned the motions of the figure above by waving her handkerchief. Immediately the man disappeared, and Lucille, agitated more than ever, rushed to the chamber of her mistress, and informed her of what she had witnessed. Teresa shook her head sadly.

"I fear you have seen only some idle workman on the neighboring walls."

"But, *mam'selle*—if he be *une ouvrier*—surely he will inform everybody—*tout le monde*—and we shall be rescued—free once more."

"Poor child; you forget we are in Mexico, where lawless acts are common. But let us trust in Heaven for all, Lucille!"

As Teresa said this, a noise at the window startled them, and turning quickly, they beheld the face of a man, at the bars. Lucille would have screamed aloud, but her voice failing her, she sunk trembling upon a couch. Teresa, however, advanced at once to the casement. The man outside occupied a strange and perilous position. Clinging with one hand to the wires while the other grasped a rope, by the aid of which he had just descended from the roof, the bold climber lowered his head, and whispered:

"Keep up your courage, miss; Putnam Pomfret's around."

Teresa's heart leaped as she recognized the well-known accents of her countryman, whose face, covered with dust and perspiration, she had not at first recognized. But, ere she could utter a word, Pomfret's finger was pressed to his lips and the next instant he released his hold of the wires and disappeared, ascending the rope with the agility of a cat. But, as he left the window, the maiden fancied she heard him whisper:

"To-morrow!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

TERESA A CAPTIVE.

ALONZO VALLEJO, wandering with his book by the margin of the placid lake, mused tenderly upon her whom he loved so well, and little dreamed of the strange drama that was involving Teresa Ginton. Too soon, however, for his peace, did the youth grow weary of solitude, turning his steps toward the hacienda. Bending his steps to the jalousied entrance, and crossing the great threshold, he called on "Teresa!" but no voice called out "Alonzo!"—no light footstep answered his call. Teresa Ginton was no longer there. She had gone—vanished. No trace remained of her flight. The few domestics of the cottage were summoned, but could give no intelligence of Teresa. No one had heard the shriek, or the voice of Lucille. And Lucille, too, was gone! What terrible mystery was here!

All night, with frenzied earnestness, Vallejo pursued the search. He explored the woods for miles around. He peered shudderingly, by torchlight, into the waters of the lake. He mounted his horse, and galloped wildly over the neighboring rocks. But no vestige, either of Teresa or her attendant, could be discovered.

At noon next day, after Lorenzo and the ladies had returned, Putnam Pomfret also presented himself, dusty and travel worn. Alonzo flew to meet him, and pour out his sad recital; to which the Yankee listened quietly. Then, taking Vallejo's hands within his own, and gazing kindly into his face, he said:

"Young feller! what 'ud ye give to know whar' Miss Teresy is? Keep a stiff upper lip, and all 'll come right; or my name ain't Putnam Pomfret."

Meantime, Teresa Ginton, in the silent apartments of Don Ricardo's mansion, trembled through the anxious hours at every noise that reached her ears. Enjoining upon Lucille to remain beside her and witness her death should she be able by no other means to avert the violence which she felt threatened, but the maiden still clung with hope to the recollection of that cry which she had heard uttered by her countryman at the window:

"To-morrow!"

To-morrow had come, its weary minutes had been counted, its last sunbeams were now trembling on the wires that barred the casements. Still no shadow of a human form appeared upon the dull surface of the dead wall opposite, upon which her gaze, like that of Lucille, was ever steadfastly directed. Suddenly a noise was heard at the door, and a low knock.

"It is not Senor Falcone now; it is—"

"Let them enter—I am prepared!" said Teresa, calmly, but with a tremor agitating her lovely frame; and Lucille, unblocking the door, admitted Don Ricardo Ramos, who bowed low and remained upon the threshold.

"If Senora Ginton is not disinclined for a few words of conversation," began the man, with his furtive smile twitching the corners of his dark mouth.

"Speak, sir—what power have I to prevent?"

"All things in courtesy," replied Ramos, in a meaning tone of voice, as he remembered the contemptuous glance of his captive. "My friend Gabriel Falcone, who loves you so intensely that I really fear for the poor youth's health, desires to know if, on the morrow, you will be pleased to meet a little party of friends?"

"I understand you not, sir!"

"I will endeavor to be intelligible. In a word, I have summoned a priest, who will to-morrow unite in the sweet bonds of matrimony, my friend Gabriel with my lovely guest, Senora Ginton."

"Sooner will I die!" exclaimed Teresa, passionately, as she retreated a step from Don Ricardo, her calmness for a moment forsaking her.

"Death is not so pleasant as marriage," laughed Ramos.

"You have my answer, sir!"

"Indeed!" cried Ramos. "What then will my friend Gabriel do?"

His eyes dwelt, as he spoke, upon Teresa's face with an expression at once so threatening and sinister, that the poor girl felt her heart sink within her bosom.

"You abandon me to this wicked man! 'Tis well—I shall defend myself!" cried Teresa, calmly returning the triumphant gaze of Ramos.

But at this moment Lucille's eyes sought those of her mistress with a meaning look. The mulatto, seated near the window, had caught a sudden glimpse of a shadow appearing upon the top of the opposite wall, and her quick glance conveyed the intelligence to her mistress. At the same time, she rushed forward, and sinking on the floor beside Teresa, cried impulsively:

"Oh, *mon Dieu*! do not die! Promise the Senor—*quelle horreur*! to be sacrificed—*innocence*! Oh, *mon Dieu*! it is not *tres difficile* to be married—"

"Rise, Lucille—and be silent!" cried Teresa, angrily, as Don Ricardo paused and surveyed them.

"Promise, *ma chère maitresse*!" persisted the mulatto. "They will kill—they will destroy us all." Then in a low whisper, scarcely reaching the maiden's ear, she said, hurriedly: "To-morrow we shall be saved—the brave Senor is here!"

"Lucille! be silent!"

But, as Teresa spoke, she sunk upon a chair beside her, her

delicate frame overpowered by the variety of her emotions. Don Ricardo saw, as he conjectured, the yielding of the timid woman, irresolute of her purpose.

"The good girl is right," said he, softly; "marriage is not so difficult. And—Falcone is a reckless fellow if he is thwarted, you know."

Teresa raised her eyes to the speaker. Lucille, crouching at the feet of her mistress, pressed her hand closely.

"Let—Gabriel Falcone come hither—to-morrow!" the maiden said, slowly.

"I doubt if his ardent love will not make him more impatient," responded Ramos, with his furtive smile. "Nevertheless, if you promise that he shall be made happy—"

"I promise nothing, but that to-morrow I will receive his visit."

"But I may say a word to give the youth some hope?" said Don Ricardo, with a low laugh.

"You may say what you please," said Teresa, coolly, as she rose, and turned with Lucille toward the inner chamber.

Ramos left the apartment, and Lucille hastened to refasten the door. At the instant, a folded slip of paper glided between the window-wires, and fell upon the floor. Teresa seized it and read it aloud with a beating heart:

"Be of good courage, Teresa. We will come for you to-morrow. ALONZO."

"Oh, Father in heaven, I thank thee!" cried the orphan, sinking on her knees, and devoutly clasping her hands, while Lucille ran to the casement wild with joy.

But Pomfret was not to be seen. Evidently aware of the presence of Don Ricardo in the chamber, he had watched the latter's departure for an opportunity to introduce the slip of paper. This accomplished, he had retraced at once his pathless way over the walls of the adjoining house. In the mean time, Don Ricardo Ramos, after leaving the presence of his anticipated victim, proceeded to another room, where Gabriel Falcone, extended upon a couch, lay awaiting his coming. The triumphant expression of the elder villain's face was noticed immediately by the gamester.

"She consents?" he cried.

"To see you to-morrow. Doubtless to reveal her long-concealed love—"

"Pish! but the marriage—"

"I am about to notify a priest of my acquaintance that he be on hand to-morrow," returned Don Ricardo. "So, my dear Gabriel, I desire you to keep quiet, and not irritate that wound of yours, which must be a painful one, though the bullet is not there."

"No, the bullet is not left, thank fortune!" said Falcone.

"I can assure that it is not so pleasant to carry such a

companion about with you," added Don Ricardo, with his sardonic smile, as at that moment he experienced a twinge of pain occasioned by the ball which lay imbedded in his groin, and had always defied extraction, save at the risk of life. Gabriel Falcone knew that his father's skill had left a lasting memento with Don Ricardo Ramos.

With slow and dignified steps, Don Ricardo took his way to a religious house belonging to one of the various orders of friars established in the city, and, inquiring for a member of the fraternity, was ushered into the refectory, where he encountered Fray Pedro, the priest who had officiated at the burial of Don Falcone, the uncle of Valljo. The worthy friar was engaged in writing at a small deal table, for he exercised the duties of a clerk in the monastery to which he was attached. At his feet crouched a large dog, which growled suddenly as Don Ricardo entered the room.

"Down, Bepo! you are unmannerly!" giving the animal a light touch with his foot. "God be with you, Don Ricardo—approach; the dog is harmless."

"His looks belie him most confoundedly, then, worthy Fray Pedro," answered Ramos, passing irreverently as the dog rose, and, displaying a row of formidable teeth, seemed prepared to dispute the visitor's advance.

"Out, Bepo, out! Indeed, he is quite unused to behave thus to visitors," apologized the friar, driving the dog beneath the table, where he crouched, silently regarding Don Ricardo with glowering eyes, and emitting now and then a low growl, not at all calculated to allay the newcomer's apprehensions.

"You should shoot such a vicious beast—hang, or at least drown him, Fray Pedro," cried Don Ricardo, taking a chair near the priest, so as to interpose the latter's person between himself and the animal.

"The dog has many good qualities, and is attached to me," answered the priest. "Poor fellow! I found him half-starved, wandering by a grave, where, doubtless, his former master was buried. He is a great protection to me. I assure you, as I walk the streets during these troublous times."

Don Ricardo failed to appreciate the generosity of the good friar concerning the merits of an animal that found very little favor with himself; so, hastily changing the subject, he said:

"I spoke to you some time since concerning a ceremony—a marriage—that I desire performed at my house. Your services will be required to-morrow."

"At your house, my son?"

"At my house the parties are now residing; and, as in these unusual times there is nothing certain but danger and death, I wish my young friends to be wedded and away from Mexico as speedily as possible. To-morrow at noonday, Fray Pedro, is the hour appointed."

"I will come, Don Ricardo," was the priest's answer, followed by a short snarl from his dog.

"Your canine friend seems no friend of mine," remarked Ramos, with his bitter laugh, as he walked to the door. "But, remember, worthy father, at noon-day, to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PLOT DEFEATED.

PUNCTUALLY as the bell announced the hour of noon upon the following day, Fray Pedro presented himself at the great door of Don Ricardo's mansion. Behind him followed the burly dog Beppo, and secretly had the dark-tinted porter opened a passage, when the animal, with a loud bark, rushed into the hall and bounded up the wide staircase. His pious master was shocked with the unwonted behavior of his favorite, and the servant of that noiseless mansion grew also very horrified as the bay of Beppo rung through the passages. At this moment Don Ricardo Ramos emerged from a door which he opened at the head of the stairs, and immediately found himself thrown to the floor by an instant rush of the dog, as the latter, dashing between his legs, darted to the interior of the house.

"That infernal brute here!" cried the enraged Ramos, as the servant ran to his assistance, and the startled priest ascended the staircase, breathing heavily in his efforts to make haste. "What in the devil's name, Fray Pedro, do you mean by bringing such a ferocious monster to my house?"

But the poor priest was too much spent with fatigue and anxiety to answer at once, and meantime the bark of Beppo, from the inner precincts of the mansion, seemed loud and joyous. Don Ricardo hurried through the passages, and Fray Pedro followed him as fast as he best might.

Those dark passages seemed interminable to the weary father, but at length his conductor reached the door of an apartment within which the dog's bark was heard, no longer violent, but apparently full of joy. A moment after, the owner of the house had led the way into a large chamber, where a singular spectacle met his follower's eyes.

The apartment was hung with tapestry and lit by waxen candles, burning in heavy silver candlesticks at different points of the room. No light entered from without, for thick curtains effectually concealed the windows.

The dog Beppo lay at the feet of a beautiful girl, who caressed the animal, while he in turn licked her white hand and laid his

huge head in her lap. Behind this maiden stood a mulatto girl, half sleeping, to add her caresses to the noble dog. A few paces from both stood a young man, whose right arm was confined to his breast by a silk scarf, while his left hand rested upon a table covered with materials for writing.

"Your dog has made friends at last, good friar," said Don Ricardo, with a harsh laugh. "How read you this?"

"The animal may remember old friends," replied the priest, significantly, looking toward Teresa, who said, quietly:

"The dog was my poor brother's—was?"

At once, as the maiden uttered these words, Fray Pedro recollected her features and recalled the occasion when he had last beheld them. An expression of wonder was visible in his countenance, and he was about to draw near to Teresa, when the voice of Don Ricardo abruptly pronounced his name.

"Fray Pedro, you are to unite these young people in matrimony," said the latter, motioning to Falcone, who approached the altar chair. Teresa half rose and placed her hand to her bosom. There was still concealed the poniard which she regarded as her resort in the extremity of danger. Lucile glided round and stood beside her mistress, and the dog, as if conscious that danger threatened the sister of his best master, crouched low before them with an ominous growl.

Teresa Ginton saw that the crisis of her fate was approaching. She gave up all hopes of rescue by her friends, and hesitated only as to whether she should make one last appeal, invoking the priest to aid her, or she should defy her persecutors, and, like her lost brother, rush unaided to the presence of God. It was a terrible alternative; for the maiden believed that Fray Pedro was a ready instrument of her cruel captors, and feared that to implore his assistance would be but to accelerate her doom. Alas! by the priest he had taken her hand in one of his own, extending the other to Falcone.

"The priest!" said Fray Pedro, looking to Don Ricardo.

"Glorial Falcone and Teresa Ginton!"

The priest's calm countenance is paralyzed with astonishment—he dropped his hands before him—then clasped them violently together, while his eyes wandered from one to the other of those he had been about to unite. As all recollection was flashing through his brain—he fell suddenly back, an expression of horror agitating his features.

"I can not perform the ceremony," he gasped. "I can not commit a mortal sin—"

"Priest, have a care," cried Ramon, in a threatening voice.

The friar started away, trembling before the aspect of the speaker, and, half mechanically, murmured:

"I can not marry them—they are the children of—"

"Of one mother!" he was about to conclude, but ere the words were spoken, his throat was violently grasped by Ramon, and

he staggered back against the wall of the apartment. Gabriel Falcone, unaware that a strange disclosure was thus suddenly checked, stood in blank surprise, while Teresa's heart sank at this new scene of violence. But another actor promptly interposed. The huge dog sprang from the floor, and at one bound reached the bosom of Fray Pedro's assailant.

"Help! Falcone! help!" cried Don Ricardo, as he felt the dog's teeth meet in his flesh, while the double weight bore him against the friar, who, struggling for life, had wound his fingers in his assailant's long hair.

The young man drew a dagger with his left hand, and, rushing forward, plunged the weapon into Bippo's breast. But he had as well wounded a lion. The pain of the stab only increased the animal's rage, and in an instant more he had turned upon Falcone, while Don Ricardo, released from his peril, lifted his own dagger against the now exhausted priest.

At this crisis a sudden crash was heard, and a burst of sunlight streamed into the apartment from a wide rent in one of the velvet curtains which had hidden the casements. Teresa and Lucile looked up and beheld the stalwart form of Putnam Pomfret. He stood with one foot extended within the drapery, while his right hand clung to the casement-frame which he had just wrenched asunder. But he was not alone; beside him, upon the stone parapet, stood Colonel Montagnone, Vallejo, and Lorenzo.

The burst of joy with which Teresa Ginton recognized her lover was mingled with the report of a pistol discharged by that lover's hand. Alfonso, with the same glance that excoriated his mistress, beheld likewise the imminent peril of his uncle's friend, Fray Pedro. Quick as thought he fired at Don Ricardo, whose dark features he had instantly recalled, and ere the smoke had cleared away, the villain had released his grasp of the priest and fallen heavily to the floor. All transpired in the space of a moment; nevertheless, this brief space had sufficed for the fierce dog to drive Falcone to a corner of the apartment, where, sheltering himself behind a piece of messy furniture, he defended himself with his dagger, which was his only weapon.

Vallejo, meanwhile, assisted Fray Pedro to a chair, for the poor priest was nearly exhausted with his struggle, and then turning to Teresa, clasped her in his arms, while Montagnone interposed to rescue Gabriel Falcone from his canine assailant. The voracious dog, however, seemed at once to recognize the defeat of his enemies, for with a low growl, in token of triumph, he walked to the chair in which Fray Pedro reclined, and crouched at his feet, quietly licking the wound which Falcone had inflicted, while his large eyes watched the writhing form of Don Ricardo, who was vainly striving to rise.

"Curses!" muttered the wretched Ramon. "Maledictions upon all priests!"

"Unhappy man! you will yourself soon need a priest," said Montagnone, approaching and stooping beside Don Ricardo. "This hurt is mortal."

"I care not. Where's Falcone—log! has he fled? Ha! ha. Where is his bride?—his sister? Oh, curse that priest, I'd strangle him!"

The tortured villain essayed to uplift his hand which still clutched the dagger with which he would have slain Fray Pedro; but the effort only forced the blood from his mouth.

"Maledictions on all of ye! Why did I meddle with the sacrament, and thus lose all? Falcone!—ha!—you should have had your will—brother and sister! ha! ha! ha!"

And with the chuckling laugh which was natural to him, Don Ricardo fell back to the floor, his eyes closing suddenly.

"He is dead!" gasped Fray Pedro, with pallid lips, as Vallejo and Teresa drew near. "And without confession."

"Confession—hah!" cried the sneering voice of Ramos, his eyes unclosing with a sinister glance on all around him; "yes, priest, let me confess. I would have married them—dost hear me, Fray Pedro? Their mother scorned and slighted me—his father branded and dishonored me. It was my revenge—hark ye, priest—to give the sacrament to both—brother and sister—ha! what think you? Have I not *confesse*?"

Again that strange laugh rung through the apartment—again the eyes closed, and this time forever. Don Ricardo Ramos had gone to his account.

Gabriel Falcone—his bold eyes sunk, his cheeks pallid as those of a corpse—had listened to the incoherent words of him who had lured him step by step to ruin. The wretched young man's glance now caught the half-averted gaze of Teresa Ginton—the child of his mother. And Charles Ginton, too, was the child of Maria Minas. Gabriel Falcone! a brother's blood is on thy head, for, but for thee, Ginton were now alive and happy!

This terrible thought burned like a flame in the heart of the generous. He cast one despairing look around him, and then, spurring the dead form of Ramos with his foot, fled precipitately from the apartment. No one followed him!

"Let the critter go!" cried Putnam Pomfret. "He's got a coal o' fire burnin' in his heart that's a nation sight wuss than bangin' or shootin', now I tell ye."

And Monzo Vallejo, clasping Teresa to his bosom, murmured, as if in prayer: "Oh, my uncle! my childhood's friend! Look down and smile upon the daughter of your beloved—the child of *Maria Minas*!"

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